

A
R E V I E W
O F
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY,
SO FAR AS IT CONCERNS THE
PROGRESS, DECLENSIONS AND REVIVALS
O F
EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE and PRACTICE;
WITH
A BRIEF ACCOUNT of the SPIRIT and METHODS
BY WHICH
VITAL and EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION
HAVE BEEN OPPOSED
In all AGES of the CHURCH.

By J O H N N E W T O N,
CURATE of OLNEY, BUCKS.

——— *Aliusque & Idem*
Nasceris ———

Gal. 4. 29. *But as then he that was born after the Flesh
persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is
now.*

L O N D O N:

Printed for EDWARD and CHARLES DILLY,
in the POULTRY.
M.DCC.LXX.

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BY JOHN NEWTON,
 CURATE OF GUNWY, BEDFORD.



LONDON:
 Printed for E. and C. Rivington, Stationers,
 in the Strand.
 MDCCLXXII.

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ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, &c.
OF THE
STATE OF THE CHURCH
DURING
THE FIRST CENTURY.

By JOHN NEWTON,
CURATE OF OLNEY, BUCKS.

Jeremiah 6. 16. *Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the Ways
and see, and ask for the old Paths, where is the good Way,
and walk therein, and ye shall find Rest for your Souls!*

Matt. 10. 25. *It is enough for the Disciple that he be as his
Master, and the Servant as his Lord: If they have called
the Master of the House Belzebub, how much more shall
they call them of his Household.*

REVIEW
OF
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY,
OF THE
STATE OF THE CHURCH
DURING
THE FIRST CENTURY.

BY JOHN NEWTON,
Cleric of the Church, &c.

Printed by J. G. & J. H. Smith, at the
Printers Office, No. 10, St. Paul's Church-yard, London.
1794.

INTRODUCTION.

TH O' the actions of mankind appear greatly diversified from the influence of particular circumstances, human nature has been always the same. The history of all ages and countries uniformly confirms the scriptural doctrine, that man is a depraved and fallen creature, and that some selfish temper, ambition, avarice, pride, revenge, and the like, are, in effect, the main springs and motives of his conduct, unless so far, and in such instances, as they are corrected and subdued by Divine Grace.

Therefore, when St. Paul speaks of the most dreadful degree of impiety that can be imagined, *Enmity against God*, he does not consider it as the fault of the particular time in which he lived, or impute it singly either to the idolatrous heathens, or the obstinate Jews, but he affirms universally, that *the carnal mind* (το φρονημα της σαρχος) the wisdom, the most spiritual and discerning faculty of man, is enmity against God. Men differ considerably in capacity, rank, education and attainments, they jar in sentiments and interests, they mutually revile, hate and destroy one

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another ;

another; but in this point they all agree. Whether Greeks or Barbarians, wise or ignorant, bond or free, the bent and disposition of their minds, while unrenewed by grace, is black and implacable enmity against the blessed God.

To those who acknowledge the authority of Scripture, St. Paul's express assertion should be sufficient proof of this point, if we could produce no other; but, besides the many other passages in the book of God to the same effect, it may be demonstrated by the most obvious proofs, experience and matter of fact. The History of the Old Testament from the death of Abel, the nature and grounds of the opposition which Jesus and his apostles met with, and the treatment of the most exemplary Christians that have lived in succeeding ages, are indisputable evidences of this offensive truth; for what can be stronger marks of enmity against God, than to despise his word, to scorn his favour, to oppose his will, to caress his enemies, and to insult and abuse his servants, for no other offence than their attachment to his service!

But when, from these premises, the apostle infers, So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God, tho' the consequence is evident, it may seem at first view unnecessary; for can it be supposed that the carnal mind, which breathes a spirit of defiance and enmity against God, will have any desire or thought of pleasing him? Yet thus it is.—The carnal mind is not only desperately wicked, but deeply deceitful; it deceives others, and often it deceives itself.

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As the magicians of Egypt, tho' enemies to Moses, attempted to counterfeit his miracles, and as Balaam could say, The Lord my God ! tho' he was wickedly engaged against the Lord's people ; so it has been usual with many who have hated and denied the power of godliness, to value themselves highly upon the form of it, and while they are alienated from the life of God, thro' the ignorance that is in them, they affect to be thought his best servants, and make the most confident claims to his favour.

The pure religion of Jesus cannot but be despised and rejected by the carnal mind: the natural man receiveth not the things of God, they are beyond his sphere, he does not apprehend them, and therefore cannot approve them ; nay, he is averse and unwilling to meddle with them, and therefore it is impossible he should understand them. But the fiercest opposition arises from the complication of presumption and hypocrisy we have spoken of; when men destitute of the spirit of God, from a vain conceit of their own wisdom and goodness, arrogate to themselves an authoritative decision in religious concerns, and would reduce the judgment and practice of others to their own corrupt standard.

Such was eminently the character of the Scribes and Pharisees, who, with unwearied malice, persecuted our Lord to the death of the cross ; and he forewarned his disciples to expect the like treatment ; he sent them forth as lambs in the midst of wolves, and assured them that their attachment to him would draw on them

the hatred of mankind, so far as even to deprive them of the rights of civil society, and the pleasures of relative life. A man's foes shall be those of his own household; his parents shall forget their affection, his children their duty, his servants their reverence, even the wife of his bosom shall despise him, when he boldly professes the gospel; nay, the most amiable qualities, joined to the most endearing connections, are not sufficient wholly to suppress the enmity which fills the hearts of the unregenerate, against those in whom they discern the image of Christ: and that this enmity would sometimes assume a religious form, and under that appearance, proceed to the greatest extremities, he informed them in another place, The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service.

If a faith and practice agreeable to the New Testament were not always attended with a measure of this opposition, we should want one considerable evidence that the gospel is true, and infidels would be possessed of one solid objection against it, namely, That our Lord was mistaken, when he predicted the reception his doctrine would meet with. But the scriptures cannot be broken: the word of Christ is fulfilled and fulfilling every day, and especially in this particular. Many perhaps will be ready to object here, and to maintain that, in our nation, and at this present time, the charge is invidious and false. It will be pleaded, that when Christianity had to struggle with Jews
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and Pagans, it could not but be opposed; but that with us, under the guard of a national establishment, an opposition to Christianity (unless by the feeble efforts of Deists and Libertines) is impracticable and inconsistent by the very terms; and that, if the delusions of a few visionary Enthusiasts are treated with that contempt and indignation which they justly deserve, this should not be stiled an opposition to Christianity, but rather a warrantable concern for its vindication, especially as no coercive methods are used; for tho' some attempts have been made to restrain the leaders from poisoning the minds of the people, yet no person is injured, either in life or property, on account of his opinions, how extravagant soever.

To this extenuation it may be replied,

1. I do not assert, that persecution and reproach must necessarily attend the *name* of a Christian, or that it is not possible to make a high profession of religion under that name, and at the same time preserve or acquire a large share of the honours, riches and friendship of the world; but I maintain with the apostle, All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. The distinction he makes in these words is observable, So much godliness as may be professed without a peculiar relation to Jesus, the world will bear, sobriety and benevolence they will applaud, even prayers, fastings, and other external acts may be commended; but to live godly in Christ Jesus—so as to profess our whole dependance

upon his free salvation, to seek all our strength from his grace, to do all expressly for his sake, and then to renounce all trust or confidence in what we have done, and to make mention of his righteousness only—this the world cannot bear; this will surely provoke the contempt or hatred of all who have not the same spirit, whether accounted Christians or Infidels, Papists or Protestants. That nothing less than what I have mentioned, can be the import of living godly in Christ Jesus, I shall in due time prove by a cloud of witnesses.

2. I acknowledge, with thankfulness to God, and to those whom he has placed in just authority over us, that the interposition of stripes, imprisonment, tortures and death, in matters pertaining to conscience, has no longer place in our happy land.

— *jacet (semperque jaceat !)*
Divini Imago Zeli et Pestis.

The spirit of persecution is repressed by the wisdom of our laws and the clemency of our princes, but we have no ground to believe it is extinct, or rather, we have sufficient evidence of the contrary. Not to mention some recent instances, in which power has been strained to its full extent, it is notorious that scorn, invective and calumny (which can act unrestrained by human laws) are employed for the same ends and purposes, which, in other countries, are more speedily effected by anathemas and sanguinary edicts.

3. The

3. The opposition I am speaking of is not primarily between men and men, simply considered, but between the spirit of the world and the spirit that is of God, and therefore the manifestation of each will be in mutual proportion. The Lord Jesus himself sustained the fiercest contradiction of sinners, because his character was superlatively excellent: his apostles, tho' far inferior to their Lord, expressed so much of his temper and conduct, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame in the next degree to him: As he was, so were they in the world. St. Paul, who laboured more abundantly than his brethren, experienced a larger share of dishonour and ill-treatment. Tho' educated at the feet of Gamaliel, and no stranger to Grecian literature, when he shewed himself determined to know nothing but Jesus, and to glory only in *his* cross, he was accounted, by Jew and Gentile, as the filth and off-scouring of all things: and thus it will hold universally. If therefore any, who sincerely espouse the gospel, meet with little disturbance or censure, it is not because the carnal mind is better reconciled to the truth than formerly in the apostles days, but because our zeal, faith and activity are so much inferior to theirs, and our conduct more conformable to the prevailing taste around us.

4. I confess that (as our Saviour has taught us to expect by the parable of the tares) revivals of religion have been generally attended with some incidental offences, and counterfeited

by many false appearances. It has been so in times past, it is so at present, and we are far from justifying every thing, and in every degree, that the world is ready to condemn. However, we cannot but complain of a want of candour and ingenuoufness in this respect also. Many who bring loud charges against what is irregular and blameable, are evidently glad of the opportunity to prejudice and alarm weak minds ; they do not confine their reproof to what is erroneous and unscriptural, but endeavour, by ambiguous expressions, invidious names, and indiscriminate censures, to obscure the state of the question, and to brand error and truth with the same mark of infamy ; they either cannot, or will not, distinguish between evangelical principles and the abuse of them, and when the distinction has been pointed out to them again and again, they refuse attention, and repeat the same stale misrepresentations which they know have been often refuted ; they will not allow a grain for infirmity or inadvertence in those whom they oppose, while they demand the largest concessions for themselves and their adherents ; they expect strict demonstrations from others, while, in their own cause, they are not ashamed to produce slanders for proofs, and jests for arguments : thus they triumph without a victory, and decide, *ex cathedra*, without so much as entering upon the merits of the cause. These methods, however successful, are not new inventions : by such arts and arms as these, Christianity was
opposed

opposed from its first appearance ; in this way Lucian, Celsus and Julian employed their talents, and made themselves famous to future times.

I judge it therefore a seasonable undertaking, to attempt the apology of Evangelical Christianity, and to obviate the sophistry and calumnies which have been published against it ; and this I hope to do, without engaging in any controversy, by a plain enumeration of facts. I propose to give a brief delineation of Ecclesiastical History from our Saviour's time, and, that the reader may know what to expect, I shall here subjoin the principal points I have in view.

I shall consider the genius and characteristic marks of the gospel which Jesus taught, and shew that, so long as this gospel was maintained in its purity, it neither admitted or found a neutrality, but that all who were not partakers of its benefits, were exceedingly enraged against it. I shall make it appear, that the same objections which have attended any reformation in later ages, were equally strong against Christianity, as taught by Christ and his first disciples ; and that the offences and irregularities which have been known to attend a revival of evangelical doctrine, in our time, were prevalent, to a considerable degree, under the preaching and inspection of the apostles.

2. When I come to the lives and conduct of those called the *Fathers*, whose names are held in ignorant admiration by thousands, I

shall prove, on the one hand, That the doctrines for which the Fathers were truly commendable, and by which many were enabled to seal their profession with their blood, were the same which are now branded with the epithets of Absurd and Enthusiastic; and on the other hand, that the Fathers, however venerable, were men like ourselves, subject to mistakes and infirmities, and began very soon to depart from the purity and simplicity of the gospel.

3. The progress of our history will manifest that the accession of wealth and power to the Christian profession proved greatly detrimental to the faith, discipline and manners of the churches, so that, after the Emperors publicly espoused the cause of Christ, the power and beauty of the gospel was gradually eclipsed. Yet, in the most degenerate times, God had a spiritual people, who, tho' partaking in some degree of the general declension, retained so much of the primitive truth and practice as to incur the hatred and persecution of (what is called) the Christian world.

4. I shall treat of the means and instruments by which the Lord supported and revived his declining cause during several centuries. 1. In the valleys of Piedmont, Provence, &c. by Berengarius, Waldo, and others. 2. In England, by Wickliff and his followers. 3. In Bohemia, by John Hufs, and Jerom of Prague. 4. In Germany, by Luther. Here I shall take occasion to observe, 1. That these successive reformations

reformations were all projected and executed, so far as God was pleased to give success, upon the same principles which are now so industriously exploded, by many who would be thought champions of the Protestant faith.

2. That Luther's reformation, the most extensive and successful, and of which we have the best accounts, was soon followed by errors, heresies, and a numerous train of abominations (as had been the case with primitive Christianity) which the Romanists, in imitation of their Pagan predecessors, joyfully laid to the charge of the doctrine which Luther preached.

5. As it was not long before the reformed countries needed a second reformation, I shall give some account of the endeavours of many good men in Germany and other places in this view, their principles, success, and the treatment they met with from those who ought to have supported them; and then I shall briefly take notice of the similar occurrences in our own country, from the end of Queen Mary's reign to the present time, together with what has been most remarkable in the history of the gospel in our American settlements.

6. I shall occasionally consider the character and conduct of those persons whom God has honoured with eminent usefulness, in the different periods of his church, point out the defects in their plan, and the mistakes which, thro' infirmity, in some degree blemished their undertakings,

7. Finally,

7. Finally, to make it evident that the spiritual worshippers of God have always been a sect every where spoken against, I shall enumerate some of the reproachful names that have been successively fixed on them, as the mark of general contempt and abhorrence, such as Patarienes, Lollards, Huguenots, Gospellers, Puritans, Pietists, &c.

These particulars will be illustrated in the course of our history, not exactly in the order here laid down, but as the series of the narration shall require or suggest. I shall not confine myself to a nice uniformity of method, or a dry detail of facts, but shall endeavour to illustrate and apply the several incidents to the use and edification of common readers, and with a view to my primary design, which is (as I have already said) to vindicate the doctrines of the Reformation, or, in other words, the main doctrines taught in the articles and homilies of the Church of England, from those unjust and disingenuous invectives which are every day cast upon them, by not a few who owe all their distinction and authority to their having solemnly engaged to defend them.

Whoever considers the intricacy and variety of Ecclesiastical History, and that the best collections of that sort have swelled to a number of folios, will not expect to find every thing that might have deserved a place. The life of a man would hardly suffice to furnish a work of this sort in its just extent.

I must content myself with selecting a competent number of the most authentic and interesting topics, from the voluminous materials already published, but which, either from the size or scarceness of the books, or the languages in which they are written, are little more known to the generality of readers, than if they had never appeared in print.

I shall avoid, as far as possible, interfering in the controversies on church government, reserving to myself, and willingly leaving to others, the rights of private judgment, the just privilege of Christians, Protestants, and Britons.

It must be confessed that the bulk of Ecclesiastical History, as it is generally understood, is little more than a history of what the passions, prejudices and interested views of men have prompted them to perpetrate, under the pretext and sanction of religion. Enough has been wrote in this way ; Curiosity, nay Malice itself, need desire no more. I propose to open a more pleasing prospect, to point out, by a long succession of witnesses, the native tendency and proper influence of the religion of Jesus ; to produce the concurring suffrage of different ages, people and languages, in favour of what the wisdom of the world rejects and reviles ; to bring unanswerable proofs that the doctrine of grace is a doctrine according to godliness, that the constraining love of Christ is the most powerful motive to obedience, that it is the property of true faith to overcome the
world,

world, and that the true church and people of Christ have endured his cross in every age; the enemy has thrust fore at them that they might fall, but the Lord has been their refuge and support; they are placed upon a rock that cannot be shaken, they are kept [φρουρουμενοι] guarded and garrisoned by the power of God, and therefore the gates of Hell have not, cannot, shall not, prevail against them.

*Per damna, per cædes, ab ipso
Ducit opes animumque ferro.*

PREFACE.

P R E F A C E.

A Review of Ecclesiastical History, upon the plan proposed in the Introduction, is a subject of so much extent and difficulty, that, if I had not entered upon it before my admission into the ministry, I believe I should not have attempted it afterwards; for I soon found that the stated care of a large parish, and a due attention to the occasional occurrences of every day, would leave me but little leisure for the prosecution of my design. Upon these accounts it was wholly intermitted for several years; and my progress, since I have resumed it, has been so slow, and my interruptions so many, that I had almost determined to content myself with publishing, in a single volume, a Review of the First Century. However, a desire of completing the work has prevailed, and I send this abroad with the title of a *first* volume, because I hope it will be followed by more, if the great God, who has the sovereign disposal of his creatures, shall be pleased to afford me a competent measure of health and ability for the service; but if he should see fit to appoint otherwise, I hope what I now offer to the public (tho' but a part
of

of my intended plan) may suffice to shew how little just ground there is for the insinuations and invectives which have been so plentifully thrown out against the preachers and professors of those doctrines which were once esteemed the life and glory of the protestant name.

I cannot expect that all my readers will be pleased with the application I have made of New Testament facts to the state of religion in our own times; but as I am not conscious that I have written a single line with a view to provoke or enflame, I have only to entreat a candid perusal, and to commit the issue to Him whom I desire to serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son. I have long thought an attempt of this kind would be seasonable; I pray that it may be useful. If it should in any measure contribute to remove or soften the prejudices by which great numbers are prevented from attending to the One Thing needful, and induced to speak evil of that which they know not, I shall account my time well employed. I hope I have been influenced by no motives but the love of truth, and a desire to promote the welfare of immortal souls, and therefore have expressed my sentiments with plainness and freedom, as I think it behoves every one to do, when treating on subjects in which the truths of God and the souls of men are immediately concerned.

OLNEY,
November 1769.

JOHN NEWTON.

A
R E V I E W, &c.
B O O K I.

Of the first Period of Christianity.

CHAP. I. The general State of the Heathens and Jews, at the Time of our Lord's Incarnation. 2. The Character and Genius of the Gospel, as taught and exemplified by Himself. 3. The true Grounds of the Opposition he met with, and the Offences and Objections urged by his Enemies to prejudice the People against him. 4. The State of his Church and Disciples, previous to the Day of Pentecost, after his Ascension.

CHAP. I.

The Wisdom and Goodness of God conspicuous in the Period assigned for Christ's Appearance. Illustrated by a summary View of the State of Mankind, before, and at, the Time of his Birth.

WHEN the first man had fallen from the happiness and perfection of his creation, had rendered himself corrupt and miserable, and was only capable of transmitting depravity and misery to his posterity; the goodness of God immediately revealed a remedy, adequate to his distressed situation. The Lord Jesus was promised under the character of the seed of the woman, as the great deliverer who should repair the breach of sin, and retrieve the ruin of human nature. From that hour, he became the object of faith, and the author of salvation, to every soul that aspired to communion with God, and earnestly sought deliverance from guilt and wrath. This discovery of a Saviour was, in the first ages, veiled under types and shadows; and, like the advancing day, became brighter and brighter, as the time of his manifestation drew

drew near: But it was always sufficient to sustain the hopes, and to purify the hearts of the true worshippers of God. That the patriarchs and prophets of old were in this sense *Christians*, that is to say, that their joy and trust centered in the promised Messiah, and that the faith, whereby they overcame the world, was the same faith in the same Lord with ours; is unanswerably proved by St. Paul. in several passages^a: Particularly in Heb. 11. where he at large insists on the characters of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses, to illustrate this very point.

^b At length, in the fulness of time (as the apostle speaks), the time marked out by the ancient prophecies, the time to which all the previous dispensations of divine providence had an express reference and subordination, and which was peculiarly suited to place the manifold wisdom of God and the truths of divine revelation in the clearest light; the long-expected Messiah appeared, as the surety and saviour of sinners, to accomplish the great great work of redemption. For these purposes, he was born of a virgin, of the family of David, at the town of Bethlehem, as the prophets had foretold. This great event took place in the 27th year of the reign of Augustus Cæsar (computing from the battle of Actium); and, according to the most received authorities, almost 1920 years from the cal-
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^a Rom. 4. Gal. 3. 16. 17.
Univ. Hist. Prideaux Connec.

^b Gal. 4. 4.

^c Bossuet

ling of Abraham, and about 4000 from the creation.

The pride and vanity of man, which prompt him to cavil with his maker, and to dispute when he ought to obey; have often objected to the expedience and propriety of this appointment. It has been asked, If Christ's appearance was so absolutely necessary, why was it so long deferred? Or if mankind could do without him for so many thousand years, why not longer or for ever? In attempting a solution of this difficulty, some well-meaning persons, from a too earnest desire to render the counsels of God more acceptable to the narrow apprehensions of unsanctified reason, have given up the ground they ought to have maintained, and made such concessions, as (if extended to their just consequence) would amount to all that the most hardened infidel can desire. The most direct and proper answer is suggested by St. Paul on a similar occasion^a, Who art thou O man that repliest against God? That the will and wisdom of the Creator should direct and limit the enquiries of his rational creatures, is a principle highly consonant to right reason itself. And there
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^a Rom. 9. 20. It is observable, in this passage, that the apostle foresees and states the great objection, which would be made to his doctrine; but does not attempt to answer it any farther, than by referring all to the will of him, who formed the whole mass and has a right to dispose of it. Had succeeding writers and teachers imitated his example, declared the plain truth in plain words, and avoided vain and endless reasonings, how many offences would have been prevented!

can hardly be a stronger proof of human depravity, than that this argument is so generally esteemed inconclusive. But waving this, a sufficient answer may be made, from the premisses already advanced.

God was not a debtor to sinful men. He might have left them all to perish (as he left the sinning angels), without the least impeachment of his goodness. But his mercy interposed, and he spared not his own Son, that sinners might be saved in a way consistent with his perfections. But though, in *compassion to us*, he provided the means of salvation; we cannot wonder, that, in *justice to himself*, he laid the plan in such a manner as might most clearly illustrate the riches of his own grace, and most effectually humble and silence the pardoned offenders: To prevent their boasting and trusting in themselves, and to give them the most affecting views of his unmerited goodness. We may therefore humbly conceive one reason, why Christ was no sooner manifested in the flesh, to have been, That the nature, effects and inveteracy of sin might be more evidently known; and the insufficiency, of every other means of relief, demonstrated, by the universal experience of many ages.

What is the history of mankind, but a diffusive exemplification of the scripture doctrines, concerning the dreadful nature and effects of sin, and the desperate wickedness of the heart of man! We are accustomed from our infancy

to call evil good, and good evil. We acquire an early prejudice in favour of heroes, conquerors, and philosophers. But if we consider the facts recorded in the annals of antiquity, divested from the false glare and studied ornaments with which the vanity of writers has disguised them, they will afford but a dark and melancholy review. The spirit of the first-born Cain appears to have influenced the whole human race: The peace of nations, cities and families has been continually disturbed by the bitter effects of ambition, avarice, revenge, cruelty and lust. The general knowledge of God was soon lost out of the world; and, when *his* fear was set aside, the restraints, dictated by the interests of civil society, were always too weak to prevent the most horrid evils. In a word, the character of all ages and countries before the coming of Christ (a few excepted, where the light of revelation was afforded) is strongly though briefly drawn by St. Paul. *Foolish* and infatuated to the highest degree, *disobedient* to the plainest dictates of nature, reason and conscience, *Enslaved* ^f to divers dishonourable *lusts and pleasures*, living in *malice and envy*, *hateful* and abominable in themselves, and incessantly *hating* and worrying one another.

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^e Titus 3. 3. ^f *Enslaved*. So the original term may be emphatically rendered.—At the controul of various and opposite passions, hurried about by them all in their turns, and incapable of resisting or refusing the motions of any.

It would be more easy, than pleasant, to make out this charge by a long induction of particulars. And, without having recourse to the most savage and uncultivated, the proof might be rested on the character of the two most celebrated and civilized nations, and at the time of their greatest refinement, the Greeks and the Romans. St. Paul has given us the result of their boasted improvements ^z in arts and sciences, in war and commerce, in philosophy and literature: And he says no more, than is abundantly confirmed by their own poets and historians. Notwithstanding the marks and fruits of fine taste and exalted genius, which were found amongst them; they were habitually abandoned to the grossest vices. Devoted to the most stupid *idolatry*, they worshipped the works of their own hands; nay, erected altars to their follies and passions. Their moral characters were answerable to their principles. Without *natural affection*, they frequently exposed their helpless infants to perish. They burned with *lusts*, not to be named without horror; and this not the meaner sort only, or in secret, but some of their finest spirits and most admired writers^h were sunk so low, as to glory in their shame, and openly avow themselves the disgrace of humanity. In their public concerns (notwithstanding their specious pretences), they were

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covenant

^z Rom. I. from v. 21. to the end. An affecting comment on this passage might be collected from Horace, Juvenal, Sallust and Suetonius. ^h See Virgil. Eclog. 2.

covenant breakers, implacable, unmerciful and unjust. Guilty of the severest oppression, while they boasted highly of equity and moderation¹; as was particularly manifested on the destruction of Carthage and Corinth: Two memorable instances of the spirit of a government, so undeservedly admired in after times. And as the Roman power, so the Grecian eloquence, was perverted to the worst purposes: To palliate crimes, to consecrate folly, and to recommend falshood under the guise and semblance of truth.

Such was the character of the people, reputed the wisest and the best of the heathens; and particularly so at the birth of Christ, when the Roman empire was at the summit of authority and splendor. A long experience had shewn the general depravity to be not only inveterate, but incurable. For, during several preceding ages, a reformation had been desired and attempted. The principal leaders in this commendable design, were called philosophers; and many of their writings are still extant. It must be acknowledged, that some of them had a faint view of several important truths: But, as they

¹ See Acts 27. 42. The soldiers would have killed all the prisoners, right or wrong, rather than one of them should have a possibility of escaping: And in this, without doubt, they consulted their own safety, and the spirit of their laws. Why, then, were the Romans so much admired? Could there be a greater proof of cruelty and injustice found amongst the most barbarous nations, than to leave prisoners, who might possibly be innocent, exposed to the wanton caprice of their keepers?

they neither knew the cause and extent of the disorder, nor the only effectual remedy ; they met with little success. Their schemes were various, inconsistent and even opposite ; and each party more successful in opposing the fallacy of other sects, than in maintaining their own. Those who came nearest the truth, and were in earnest to promote it, were very few. Even these were ignorant of some things absolutely necessary to the attainment of the desired end. The best of them were restrained by the fear of men, and a regard to established customs. What they *could* and *did* propound, they had no sufficient authority, or influence, to impress upon the consciences of men. And if, in a few instances, they seemed to succeed ; the advantage was only imaginary : Where they prevailed on any to relinquish intemperance, they made them full amends by gratifying their pride. The business passed from hand to hand, from sect to sect, but all to no purpose. After innumerable disputations, and volumes, concerning the supreme good, the beauty of virtue, the fitness of things, and other high sounding topics ; they left matters as bad or worse than they found them. They could not effectually inculcate their doctrine upon a single village or family. Nay, they were but half persuaded themselves, and could not act up to their own principles *, when they most needed their support.

A still

* Witness the prevarication of Socrates, and the irresolution of Cicero, towards the close of their lives.

A still more affecting view of the degeneracy of human nature, we have, in the history of the Israelites; whom God was pleased to set apart from the rest of mankind, for several important purposes. He revealed himself to this people, when they were groaning under a heavy bondage in Egypt, from which they had neither spirit nor power to deliver themselves. He freed them from their captivity, by a series of illustrious miracles. He led them through the sea and the desert. He honoured them with the symbols of his immediate presence; was a wall of fire round about them; and a glory in the midst of them. He spoke to them with an audible voice, and fed them with manna from heaven. He put them in possession of a good land, and fought against all their enemies. Might it not have been expected, that a people, so highly favoured and honoured, should have been obedient and thankful? Some of them were so. His grace always preserved a spiritual people amongst them, whose faith in the Messiah taught them the true meaning of the levitical law, and inspired them with zeal and sincerity in the service of God. But the bulk of the nation was always refractory and disobedient. While in the wilderness, they murmured against the Lord upon every new difficulty. Within a few days after the law had been delivered in flames and thunder from the top of Sinai, they formed a molten calf to worship, and would have made a captain who might lead them back into

into Egypt. They despised the good land, therefore their carcases¹ fell in the wilderness. Their posterity retained the same spirit. They learned the ways of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before them. They adopted every idolatrous practice, they transgressed every divine command. During a long succession of warnings, chastisements and deliverances, they became worse and worse; so that, in Jeremiah's time, they equalled or exceeded the heathens around them, in ignorance and wickedness. They mocked the messengers of God, despised his words, and misused his prophets; till his wrath arose against them and there was no remedy. At length their land was laid waste, Jerusalem burnt, the greater part of the people destroyed, and the remainder carried captives into Chaldea.

Upon their return from captivity, they seemed, for a little while, to retain a sense of their duty, and of the judgments they had suffered. But all was soon forgot. Their wickedness now put on a new form, and discovered the evil of the heart of man in a new point of view.

They

¹ 1 Cor. 10. 5. They were overthrown in the wilderness *κατεσθηνον*. They fell in heaps, like grass before the scythe. And this, after all the great things they had seen and been partakers of. Of the many hundred thousands, who were above 20 years old, when they were delivered from Egypt; only two persons were spared to enter the promised land. A striking admonition to us, not to rest in the participation of external privileges of any kind. For these people had seen the Lord's wonders at the red sea, had rejoiced in the destruction of the Egyptians, and been fed with manna from heaven.

They were no longer prone to idolatry. They avoided the most distant appearance of it, with scrupulous exactness; and professed the highest attachment to God. They boasted themselves in his law; and, from a presumption that they were his peculiar people, they despised and hated the rest of mankind. It is not our present concern, closely to follow their history. Let it suffice to say, that, by substituting a regard to the letter of the law, in the place of spiritual obedience, and by presuming to multiply their own inventions and traditions^m, and to hold them no less binding than the positive commands of God; they, by degrees, attained to a pitch of impiety unknown to former times: And which was so much the more offensive and abominable, as it was covered with the mask of religion, and accompanied with a claim to superior sanctity.

Pride, hypocrisy and interest divided them into sects; and the contests of each party, for superiority, threw the state into frequent commotions. Their intrigues at length brought upon them the Roman power. The city was taken

^m See one instance Matt. 15. 5. The expression is rather obscure: But the sense is, *What you might expect from me for your support, I have put out of my own power; it is devoted to the service of God and the temple.* And teachers allowed this to be a legal exemption. Any man, who would pay handsomely to the priests and the temple, might treat his parents as he pleased. Thus they set aside the express command of God, by their own authority, and for their own advantage. The same dispensing, commuting, engrossing spirit has too often appeared in the christian church.

taken by Pompey ; and, though they afterwards retained a shadow of liberty, their government was determined, from that time, by the will of the conquerors. At length, Herod, a foreigner, obtained it. In his reign, CHRIST was born.

Thus the state of mankind, before the coming of Christ, proved, with the fullest evidence, the necessity of his interposition. And, in the mean time, the world had not been left utterly helpless and hopeless. His future advent had been revealed from the beginning ; and, by faith in that revelation, a remnant had subsisted in every age, who had triumphed over the general evil, and maintained the cause of God and truth. It was not necessary to the salvation of *these*, that he should have been manifested sooner ; for they beheld his day afar off, and rejoiced in his name. With respect to *others*, destitute of divine faith, his incarnation would have had the same effect at any period, as it had on multitudes who actually saw him in the flesh ; but, offended with the meanness of his circumstances and the great honours he vindicated to himself, rejected him with disdain.

But farther. The late appearance of Christ in the world, gave room for the full accomplishment of the prophecies concerning him, which had been repeated at different times with increasing clearness and precision : Infomuch that the time, place and every circumstance of his birth, life and death, had been distinctly foretold. Thus the truth and authority of the old
testament

testament were confirmed; and the wisdom, power and providence of God, over-ruling and directing the contingencies of human affairs to produce this grand event in its determinate period, were displayed to the highest advantage. And as the state of the *moral* world made his presence highly necessary; so God, in due time, disposed the *political* state of mankind in such a manner, as to prepare the way for a speedy and general publication of the gospel through the world.

It would be pleasing, to consider, how the rise and fall and change of empires were made successively subservient to introduce the kingdom of Jesus. But this would lead me beyond my present bounds. I can only just hint at two or three events, which had a more general influence. The *first* is, The rapid progress of Alexander: Whose extensive conquests, divided amongst his successors, laid the foundation of four powerful monarchies, and opened an intercourse between countries till then unknown to each other. By this means, the Greek tongue became familiar and common to many nations; and, soon after, the Hebrew scriptures were translated into that language, and the prophecies concerning the Messiah were laid open to the Gentiles. To this may be added the several dispersions of the Jews; who, upon various occasions, had been settled in almost every considerable city under the heathen governments. By their traditions and prophecies, imperfectly understood, a general expectation, had

had been raised, of some extraordinary deliverer, who would shortly appear. Lastly, by the growth of the Roman empire, many nations and people, who were before acquainted by means of one common language, became more closely united under one dominion. Every province had a necessary connection with Rome, and Rome was the center and resort of the greatest part of the then habitable world.

As to the Jews, many things concurred to animate their wishes and expectations of the Messiah's approach. The prophecies were in their hands. Many of their wise men were apprised, that the term of seventy weeks, spoken of by Daniel, was drawing to a period. The sceptre seemed departing from Judah; they groaned under a foreign yoke, from which, they vainly imagined, the Messiah would set them free, and give them, in their turn, a temporal dominion over the nations of the earth. Tho' this mistake prompted them to reject Christ, when he preached a deliverance unsuitable to their worldly notions; yet, it made them solicitous and eager for the appearance of the person, on whom their hopes were fixed. A few amongst them, however, better instructed in the true meaning of the prophecies, were secretly waiting, in the exercises of faith and prayer, for the consolation of Israel ^a.

From this general view of the moral and political state of mankind, and the leading designs of divine revelation and providence,
previous

^a Luke 2. 3.

previous to the birth of Christ; we may conclude, that the time fixed on from before the foundation of the world for his actual exhibition amongst men, was not an arbitrary, but a wise and gracious appointment. A determination admirably suited to place the most important truths in the strongest light. In this way the depravity, misery and helplessness of man; the mercy of God, and the truth of the scriptures; were unquestionably proved to all succeeding times. The necessity of a Saviour was felt and acknowledged; and the suitability, all-sufficiency and condescension of Jesus, when he undertook and accomplished the great designs in which his love engaged him, were more strongly illustrated by the preceding contrast. He knew the whole human race were sinners, rebels, enemies against God: He knew the terms, the price of our redemption; that he must obey, suffer, weep, and die. Yet he came. He emptied himself of his glory and honour, and took on him the form of a servant, to bring the glad tidings of salvation to men. In effect, the gospel of Christ soon appeared to be the great *desideratum*; and compleatly redressed the evils, which philosophy had given up as desperate. The genius and characteristic marks of this gospel will be considered in the following chapter.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

The Character and Genius of the Gospel as taught and exemplified by Christ.

A SUCCINCT history of the life of our Lord and Saviour is no part of our plan. This the inspired evangelists have performed with the highest advantage and authority; and their writings (through the mercy of God) are generally known and read in our own tongue. It will be sufficient for me to select a few passages from them, to explain and confirm the several points I have proposed to treat of in this book; as principles whereon to ground our observations on the spirit and conduct of after-times.

At present I propose to state the true character and genius of his doctrine. This may seem a digression from my main design. But as I shall often have occasion to speak of the gospel, and the opposition it has met with, it will not be improper, in the first place, to exhibit a general idea of what we mean by the gospel; especially as the professed followers of Christ have been and still are not a little divided upon the point.

We may describe the gospel to be—*A divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, discovering the misery of fallen man by sin, and the means of his compleat recovery by the free grace of God, through faith, unto holiness and happiness.*

pinefs. The explication and proof of these particulars from our Lord's exprefs declarations, and the tenor of his conduct, will fufficiently point out the principal marks and characters of his gospel. But before we enter upon this, two things may be premifed.

1. Though I confine myself to the writings of the evangelifts in this difquifition, yet it fhould be remembered that whilft our Lord was vifibly converfant with men, he did not ordinarily discover the whole fyftem of his doctrine in exprefs terms. He fpoke to the multitude for the moft part in parables^o, and was not forward to proclaim himfelf the Mefſiah upon every ^p occaſion. And even in his more intimate difcourſes with his diſciples, he taught them with a wife and gracious accommodation to their circumſtances and weakneſs^q. The full explanation of many things, he referred to the time when having accompliſhed his wiſh, and returned victorious and triumphant into heaven, he ſhould ſend down according to his promiſe the holy ſpirit to enlighten and comfort his people. Then^r and

^o Matt. 13. 10, 11. ^p Ch. 16. 20. ^q John 16. 12, 25. Our Lord taught his diſciples gradually, their knowledge advanced as the light, or (according to his own beautiful ſimile) firſt the blade, then the ear; firſt green corn, then fully ripe. He conſidered their difficulties, he made allowance for their infirmities. It is to be wiſhed his example was followed by all who teach in his name. Some are ſo haſty, they expect to teach to others in one diſcourſe or interview, all that they have attained themſelves by the ſtudy and experience of many years. ^r Mark 9. 10. John 2. 22.

and not before they fully understood the meaning of all they had seen and heard, while he was with them.

2. The doctrine of the gospel is not like a mathematical problem, which conveys precisely the same degree of truth and certainty to every one that understands the terms. If so, all believers would be equally enlightened, who enjoy the common privilege of the written word. But there is in fact an amazing variety in this respect. Where this doctrine is truly understood, though in the lowest degree, it inspires the soul with a supreme love to Jesus, and a trust in him for salvation. And those who understand it best, have not yet received all the evidence, comfort and influence from it, which it is capable of affording. The riches of grace and wisdom in this dispensation are unsearchable * and immense, imparted in different measures, and increased from time to time, according to the good pleasure † of the spirit of God, who furnishes his people with light and strength proportioned to their exigencies, situation, and the services or trials he calls them to; not without respect to the degree of their diligence, obedience and simplicity in waiting upon him. For these reasons it is not to be expected that every one who serves God with his spirit in the gospel of his son, should have exactly the same views of this sublime subject. Neither do I presume to think myself capable of displaying it in its

C 2

full

* Ephes. 3. 8. † 1 Cor. 12. 11.

full light and beauty. I desire therefore to write with candour, and entreat a candid perusal, as conscious of my infirmities, and the imperfections necessarily attending the human mind, in this present state of things. Yet I am not afraid to express my just confidence, that I shall advance no principle, as a part of the gospel doctrine, which does not assuredly belong to it.

I now proceed to explain and confirm the definition I have given of the gospel.

1. It is a divine revelation, a discovery of truths which though of the highest moment could have been known no other way. That God will forgive sin, is beyond the power of unassisted reason to prove. The prevailing custom of sacrifices is indeed founded upon such a hope, but this practice was without doubt derived from revelation, for reason could not have suggested such an expedient. And those among the heathens, whether priests or philosophers, who spoke of forgiveness of sin, knew but little what sin was. Revelation was needful to discover sin in its true nature and demerit; and where this is known, the awakened and wounded conscience is not easily persuaded, that a just and holy God will pardon iniquity. So likewise the immortality of the soul, after all the fine things said upon the subject, remained a problematical point among the heathen. Their best arguments, though conclusive to us, were not so to themselves

selves. " When they laid aside their books and returned to the common affairs of life, they forgot the force of their own demonstrations. But the gospel of Christ is an express, complete and infallible revelation; as he himself often assured his hearers^w.

And as the subject matter of the gospel contained in the new testament is a revelation from God; so it is only by a divine revelation, that what is there read or heard can be truly understood. This is an offensive assertion, but must not be omitted when the question is concerning the marks and characters of Christ's doctrine. Thus when Peter made that noble confession, * Thou art Christ the son of the living God, our Lord answers, Blessed art thou Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my father which is in heaven. If Peter could read, and had the scriptures to peruse, these were advantages derived from flesh and blood; from his birth, parents and teachers; advantages which the Scribes and Pharisees, our Lord's most inveterate enemies, enjoyed in common with him. The difference lay in a revelation of the truth to his heart. As it is said in another place, Thou ^v hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes.

C 3

2. It

* Cicero frankly confesses this. Nescio quomodo, dum lego, assentior; cum posui librum, et mecum ipse de immortalitate animorum cæpi cogitare, assentio omnis illa elabatur. Tusc. Quest. Lib. I.

* Matt. 16. 16, 17. ^v That babes should be admitted

to

2. It is a revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. As a revelation it stands distinguished from all false religions, and as revealed in the person of Jesus, it is distinguished from all former dispensations of the true God, who in time past had spoken by the prophets, but was pleased in those last days to speak unto us by his son. The law was given by Moses, both to enforce the necessity of an universal sinless obedience, and to point out *the efficacy* of a better mediator; but grace and truth, *Grace answerable to the sinners guilt and misery*, and the truth and full accomplishment of all its typical services came by Jesus Christ. All the grand peculiarities of the gospel center in this point the constitution of the person of Christ. In the knowledge of him standeth our eternal life. And though our Lord on some occasions refused to answer the captious questions of his enemies, and expressed himself so as to leave his hearers in suspense: Yet at other times he clearly asserted his own just rights and honours, and proposed himself as the supreme object of love, trust and worship, the fountain of grace and power, the resurrection, life and happiness of all believers.

That he vindicated to himself those characters and prerogatives which incommunicably belong

to this knowledge, and express a certainty, where the wise are all perplexity and darkness, is extremely mortifying to human pride. But are not these the words of Christ? How arrogant, how dangerous must it be, to be displeased with that dispensation at which he rejoiced! * Col. 2.

3, 9. John 17. 3.

belong to God, is evident from the texts referred to. He ^a was a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart. He forgave sins. ^b He adopted the style of supreme majesty. His wonderful works were proof of an almighty power. ^c He restored sight, health and life with a word, ^d he controuled the elements, and shewed himself ^e Lord of quick and dead, angels and devils, and both his enemies and his friends understood his claim. The Jews attempted to stone him ^f for making himself equal to God, and he received from Thomas the most express and solemn ascription of deity that can be offered from a creature to his Creator ^g.

Yet all this glory was veiled. The word was made flesh, he assumed the human nature, and shared in all its infirmities, sin excepted. He was born of a woman, he passed through the states of infancy, childhood and youth, and gradually increased in wisdom and stature^h. He was often, yea, always afflicted.

C 4

He

^a Matt. 9. 2, 3. ^b John 8, 38. John 14. 9. *He that hath seen me hath seen my father.* Which of all the creatures of God dare use these words! God in the strict sense is invisible and inaccessible, but he communicates with his creatures through Christ his son, without whom he cannot be seen or known at all. We cannot enjoy any spiritual, clear and comfortable views of God, unless our thoughts fix upon the man Christ Jesus, he is the door and the veil to the holy of holies, and there is no coming to the father by any other way. ^c Matt. 8. 3. 9. 30. John 4. 53. ^d Matt. 14. 25. Mark 4. 39. ^e John 11. 25, 44. Luke 4. 34. Matt. 4, 11. 26. 53. ^f John 5. 18. 10. 33. ^g John 20. 28. ^h Luke 2. 52.

He endured ⁱ hunger, thirst and weariness, He ^k sighed, he wept, he groaned, he bled, he died; but amidst all, he was spotless and undefiled. He ^l repelled the temptations of Satan, he appealed to his most watchful enemies for his integrity, he rendered universal unceasing obedience to the will of God, and compleatly fulfilled the whole law. In him the perfection of wisdom and goodness shined forth. He burned with love to God, with compassion to men, a compassion which he freely extended to the most necessitous and the most unworthy. He returned good for evil, wept ^m for his enemies, prayed for his murderers. Such was his character, a divine person in the human nature, ⁿ God manifest in the flesh. And from this union, all he did, and all he said, derived a dignity, authority and efficacy which rendered him every way worthy to be the Teacher, Exemplar, Lord and Saviour of mankind.

3. In the person and sufferings of Christ there is at once a discovery of the misery of fallen man, and the means of his complete recovery. *It has already been observed that the full explication of these truths was deferred 'till after his resurrection; and the subsequent writings of his apostles are useful to give us a compleat view of the cause, design*
and

ⁱ Mark 11. 12. John 4. 6. 7. ^k Mark 7. 34. John 11. 35. 38. Luke 22. 44. ^l Matt. 4. 1. 12. John 8. 46. 14, 30. 17, 4. ^m Luke 19. 41. 23, 34. ⁿ Tim. 3. 16.

and benefits of his passion. At present we confine ourselves to his own words. He frequently ^o taught the necessity and certainty of his sufferings, he spoke of them as the great design of his incarnation, that it was by this means he should draw ^p all unto himself, that he was on this account, especially, the object of his fathers complacency, because he voluntarily substituted himself to die for his people. He enforced the necessity ^q of believing on him in this view. And applied to himself the prophecies of the old testament ^r, which speak to the same purpose. Isaiah had foretold, That the Lord would lay upon him the iniquities of us all, that he was to be wounded for our transgressions, and by his stripes we should be healed. Here then we see the manifold wisdom of God. His inexpressible love to us commended, his mercy exalted in the salvation of sinners, his truth and justice vindicated, in the full satisfaction for sin exacted from the surety, his glorious holiness and opposition to all evil, and his invariable faithfulness to his threatnings and his promises. Considered in this light, our Saviour's passion is the most momentous, instructive and comfortable theme that can affect the heart of man. But if his substitution and proper atonement are denied, the whole is unintelligible. We can assign no sufficient reason why a person of his excellence was abandoned to

^o Matt. 16. 21, 20, 28. ^p John 12, 32. 10, 17.
^q John 3. 14—18. ^r Luke 24, 25—27. Isa. 53.

to such miseries and indignities ; nor can we account for that agony and distress which seized him at the prospect of what was coming upon him. It would be highly injurious to his character, to suppose he was thus terrified by the apprehension of death or bodily pain, when so many frail and sinful men have encountered death, armed with the severest tortures, with far less emotion.

Here, as in a glass, we see the evil of sin, and the misery of man. The greatness of the disorder may be rationally inferred from the greatness of the means necessary to remove it. Would we learn the depth of the fall of man, let us consider the depth of the humiliation of Jesus to restore him. Behold the beloved of God perfectly spotless and holy, yet made an example of the severest vengeance, prostrate and agonizing in the garden, enduring the vilest insults from wicked men, torn with whips and nails and thorns, suspended, naked, wounded and bleeding upon the cross, and there heavily complaining, that God had for a season forsaken him. Sin was the cause of all his anguish. He stood in the place of sinners, and therefore was not spared. Not any, or all the evils which the world has known, afford such proof of the dreadful effects, and detestable nature of sin, as the knowledge of Christ crucified. Sin had rendered the case of mankind so utterly desperate, that nothing less than the blood and death of Jesus could retrieve it. If any other expedient

dient could have sufficed, his prayer that the bitter cup might pass from him, would surely have been answered. But what his enemies intended as the keenest reproach, his redeemed people will for ever repeat as the expression of his highest praise. * *He saved others, himself he cannot save.* Justice would admit no inferior atonement, love would not give up the cause of fallen, ruined *man*. Being therefore determined to save others, he could not consistently with this gracious design and undertaking, deliver himself.

Again, the means and certainty of a salvation proportioned to the guilt and misery of sinners, and a happiness answerable to the utmost capacity of the soul of man, are revealed in the same astonishing dispensation of divine love. When Jesus was baptized he was pointed out by a voice from heaven; † *This is my beloved son, in whom* (or for whose sake) *I am well pleased.* He afterwards proclaimed his † own authority and sufficiency, that all things were delivered into his hands, and invited every weary, heavy laden † soul to seek to him for refreshment and peace. He gave the most express assurances, that whoever applied to him should in no case be rejected. He † mentioned his death and sufferings as the principal circumstance that should engage the hearts and confirm the hopes of sinners. He gave repeated promises that those who believe in him

* Luke 23. 35. † Matt. 3. 17. † Matt. 11. 27,
28. † John 6. 37. † John 12. 32, 33.

him shall never ^y perish, that neither force or fraud should frustrate his intentions in their favour. That after his ascension he would send the holy ^z spirit to supply his bodily presence, and that his power, grace and providence should be with his people to the end of the world. Finally, that he would manage their ^b concerns in heaven, and at length return to take them to himself, that they might be with him for-ever, to behold and to share his glory.

4. In this revelation God has illustriously displayed the glory of his free grace. The miserable and guilty, who find themselves without either plea or hope, but what the gospel proclaims by Christ, are invited without exception, and received without condition. Though they have been the vilest offenders, they are freely accepted in the beloved, and none of their iniquities shall be remembered any more. On the contrary, the most respectable characters amongst men, are declared to be of no avail in point of acceptance with God, but in this respect all the race of Adam are upon equal terms, and must be involved in the same ruin, without an absolute dependance on the great Mediator. This is an illustrious peculiarity of the gospel, which the proud, fallen nature of man, cannot but resist and find fault with, 'till the conscience is truly affected with the guilt and demerit of sin.

The

^y John 10. 38. ^z John 16. 7, 13, 14. Matt. 28, 20. ^b John 14. 3, 13, 14.

The whole tenor of our Saviour's ministry was suited to depreciate the most specious attainments of those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and to encourage all who felt and confessed themselves to be miserable sinners.

[*Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos.*] This was a chief cause of the opposition he met with in his own person, and has awakened the hatred and dislike of the bulk of mankind against his doctrine ever since. It is necessary, therefore, to confirm it by proofs, which cannot be evaded by any who profess to acknowledge him to be a teacher sent from God.

He was daily conversant with many who were wise and righteous in their own eyes, and we find he omits no opportunity to expose and condemn their pretensions. He spake one parable purposely to persons of this stamp^c, and describes a Pharisee boasting of his observance of the law. He paid tythes, he fasted, he prayed, he was not chargeable with adultery or extortion. He could say more for himself than many can who affect to be thought religious. But the poor publican (though despicable in his sight) who conscious of his unworthiness durst not lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, and cried for mercy, was in a happier and safer condition than the other with all his boasted obedience.

Another remarkable instance is that of the ruler^d, who accosted our Lord in a respectful manner,

^c Luke 18. 9—14. ^d Matt. 19. 16. Luke 18. 18.

manner, asking him, What he should do to inherit eternal life. His address was becoming, his enquiry seemed sincere ; and the character he gave of himself was such, as men, who see not the heart, might have judged exemplary and praise-worthy. When our Lord referred him to the precepts of the law, he answered that he had kept them all from his youth. Yet one thing we read was wanting. What could this one thing be, which rendered so fair a character of no value ? We may collect it from the event. He wanted a deep sense of his need of a Saviour. If he had been possessed of this one thing, he would willingly have relinquished all to follow Jesus. But ignorant of the spirituality of the law, he trusted to a defective obedience ; and the love of the world prevailing in his heart, he chose rather to part with Christ than with his possessions.

On the other hand, how readily our Lord received sinners, notorious sinners, who were vile to a proverb, appears from the remarkable account given by St. Luke^e of a woman whose character had been so infamous, that the Pharisee wondered that Jesus could permit her to touch him. But though a great sinner, she found great forgiveness, therefore she loved much and wept^f much. She had nothing to say

^e Luke 7. 37. ^f She washed his feet with tears. *Erxato Brechein.* She began to rain tears upon his feet. Her head was waters, and her eyes fountains. To receive a free pardon of many sins, a pardon bought with blood—'tis this causes the heart to melt, and the eyes to flow.

say for herself, but Jesus espoused her cause, and pronounced her pardon. He likewise silenced the proud caviller by a parable, that sweetly illustrates the freeness and genuine effect of the grace of God, which can only be possessed or prized by those who see they must perish without it.

And this was the general effect of his preaching. Publicans and sinners thronged to hear him, received his doctrine, and found rest for their souls. As this discrimination gave a general offence, he took occasion to deliver the parable of the prodigals. In the former part of which he gives a most endearing view of the grace of God, in pardoning and accepting the most undeserving. He afterwards in the close shews the pride, stubbornness and enmity of the self-righteous Pharisees, under the character of the elder ^b brother. While his language and deportment discovered the disobedience and malice of his heart, he pretended that he had never broke his father's commands. The self-condemned sinner, when he first receives hope of pardon, experiences a joy and peace in believing: This is represented by the feast

^a Luke 15. 11. ^b It may be objected to this interpretation, that the father speaks to the elder brother in terms of complacency. *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.* But this is not the only place where our Lord addresses the Pharisees in their own style, according to the opinion they conceived of themselves. Thus Matt. 8. 12. He says, *The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness*—he does not mean those who were truly the children of the kingdom, but those who pretended to be so.

feast and fatted calf. But the religious orderly brother had never received so much as a kid. He had found no true comfort in all his formal round of duties, and therefore was exceedingly angry that the prodigal should at once obtain those marks of favour, which he, who had remained with his father, had been always a stranger to.

But the capital exemplification of this, and indeed of every doctrine of the gospel, is contained in the account given of the thief¹ upon the cross. A passage which has perhaps been more mistaken and misrepresented by commentators, than any other in the new testament. The grace of God has shone so bright in this instance, that it has dazzled the eyes even of good men. They have attempted to palliate the offender's crime, or at least to suppose that this was the first fault of the kind he had committed; that perhaps he had been surprised into it, and might in other respects have been of a fairer character. They conjecture that this was the first time he had heard of Jesus, and that there was not only some sort of merit in his faith and confession under these circumstances, but that the death of Jesus happily co-inciding with his own, afforded him an advantage peculiar to himself. And that therefore this was an exempt case, and not to be drawn into a precedent to after-times.

If

¹ Luke 23. 39—42.

If it was my professed design to comment upon this malefactor's case, I should consider it in a different light. The nature of his punishment, which was seldom inflicted but on those who were judged the most atrocious criminals, makes it more than probable that he did not suffer for a first offence. Nor was he simply a *thief*. The history of those times abounds with the mischiefs committed by public robbers, who used to join in considerable bands for rapine and murder, and commit the greatest excesses. In all likelihood, the malefactors crucified with Jesus were of this sort, accomplices and equals in guilt, and therefore judged to die together, receiving (as appears by the criminal's own confession on the cross) the just reward of their deeds^k. Here was indeed a fair occasion to shew the sovereignty and triumph of grace, contrasted with the most desperate pitch of obdurate wickedness. To shew on the one hand, that the compassion and the power of Christ were not diminished, when his sufferings were at the height, and he seemed abandoned to his enemies; and on the other, the insufficiency of any means to change a sinner's heart without the powerful efficacy of divine grace. The one malefactor brought at length to deserved punishment, far from

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repenting

^k It seems probable from the history that these were of Barabbas's gang. They had made an insurrection, committed murder, and were with their ringleader convicted and condemned. He in dishonour to Jesus was spared, whilst these his accomplices were executed with him.

repenting of his crimes, regardless of his immediate appearance before God, thought it some relaxation of his torments, to join with the barbarous multitude in reviling Jesus, who hung upon a cross by his side. He was not ignorant that Jesus was put to death, for professing himself the Messiah, but he upbraided him with his character, and treated him as an impostor. In this man we see the progress, wages and effects of sin. His wickedness brought him to a terrible end, and sealed him up under a fatal hardness of heart, so that he died desperate, though Jesus Christ was¹ crucified before his eyes. But his companion was impressed by what he saw, his heart relented. He observed the patience of the divine sufferer, he heard him pray for his murderers; he felt himself miserable, and feared the God with whom he had to do. In this distress he received faith to apply to Jesus, and his prayer was granted and exceeded. He who sent the fair spoken ruler away sorrowful, answered the first desire of a malefactor at the point of death. *This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.* This certainly was an instance of free distinguishing grace. Here was salvation bestowed upon

¹ Comp. Matt. 27. 39. How can it be expected that no more than a constant repetition of Christ's death, should be an invincible means of changing the heart, when the actual sight of his sufferings was attended with so little effect! Sin must be felt as the disease and ruin of the soul, and the sufferings of Jesus acknowledged as the only possible remedy, before we can truly sympathize with him, and say, I am crucified with Christ.

upon one of the vilest sinners, through faith in Jesus, without previous works, or a possibility of performing any. And as such, it is recorded for the encouragement of all who see themselves destitute of righteousness and strength, and that, like the thief on the cross, they have no refuge or hope, but in the free mercy of God through Christ.

5. The medium, by which the gospel becomes the power of God unto salvation, is *Faith*. By faith we do not mean *a bare assent*, founded upon testimony and rational evidence, *that the facts recorded in the new testament are true*. A faith of this sort, experience proves to be consistent with a wicked life; whereas the gospel faith purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. Neither do we mean, a confidence of the forgiveness of sin impressed upon the mind in a sudden and instantaneous manner. Faith is indeed founded upon the strongest evidence, and may often be confirmed by ineffable manifestations from the fountain of light and comfort; but the discriminating property of true faith, *is a reliance upon Jesus Christ, for all the ends and purposes for which the gospel reveals him*. Such as the pardon of sin, peace of conscience, strength for obedience, and eternal life. It is wrought by the operation of the holy spirit, and presupposes a knowledge of him and of ourselves; Of our indigence, and his fulness; our unworthiness, and his merits; our weakness, and his power. The true believer builds upon

the ^m person and word of Christ as the foundation of his hope ; he enters by him as the only ⁿ door to the knowledge, communion and love of God ; he feeds upon him by faith in his heart, with thanksgiving, as ^o the bread of life ; he embraces his righteousness as the the wedding ^p garment, whereby alone he expects admission to the marriage-feast of heaven. He derives all his strength and comfort from his influence, as the branch ^q from the root. He entrusts himself to his care, as the wise and good shepherd ^r of his soul. Sensible of his own ignorance, defects, and his many enemies, he receives Christ ^s as his teacher, priest and king, obeys his preceptor, confides on his mediation, expects and enjoys his powerful protection. In a word, he renounces all confidence ^t in the flesh, and rejoices in Christ Jesus as his Saviour ; and thus he attains to worship God in spirit and in truth, is supported through all the conflicts and trials of life, possesses a stable peace in the midst of a changing world, goes on from strength to strength, and is, at length, made more than conqueror, through him that has loved him. This is the life of faith. The degree and exercise of it is various in different person, and in the same person at different times (*as has been already hinted*) ; but the principle itself is universal, permanent and efficacious in all that

^m Matt. 7. 24. 16. 18. ⁿ John 10. 9. ^o John 6. 54—57. ^p Matt. 22. 11. Rom. 13. 14. ^q John 15. 4, 5. ^r John 10. 14. ^s John 6. 68. ^t Phil. 3. 3.

that truly believe. And nothing less than this faith is sufficient to give any man a right to the name of a Christian.

6. The final cause, or great ends of the the gospel (respecting man) are " holiness and happiness. The complete restoration of the soul to the favour and image of God, or eternal life begun here, to be consummated in glory. What has been already said, renders it needless to enlarge upon this head. Nor shall we concern ourselves here to vindicate this doctrine we have laid down from the charge of licentiousness, because it is our professed design in the progress of this work, to prove from the history of the church, not only that these principles, when rightly understood, will infallibly produce obedience and submission to the whole will of God, but that these only can do it. Wherever and whenever the doctrines of free grace and justification by faith have prevailed in the christian church, and according to the degree of clearness with which they have been enforced, the practical duties of Christianity have flourished in the same proportion. Wherever they have declined, or been tempered with the reasonings and expedients of men, either from a well meant, though mistaken fear, lest they should be abused, or from a desire to accommodate the gospel, and render it more palatable to the depraved taste of the world, the consequence has always been an equal declension in practice. So long as the

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gospel

" Matt. 1. 21. 25. 34. John 17. 24.

gospel of Christ is maintained without adulteration, it is found sufficient for every valuable purpose; but when the wisdom of man is permitted to add to the perfect work of God, a wide door is opened for innumerable mischiefs—the divine commands are made void, new inventions are continually taking place, zeal is diverted into a wrong channel, and the greatest stress laid upon things, either unnecessary or unwarrantable. Hence, perpetual occasion is given for strife, debates and divisions, 'till at length, the spirit of Christianity is forgot, and the power of godliness lost amidst fierce contentions for the form.

To sum up this enquiry in few words. The gospel is a wise and gracious dispensation, equally suited to the necessities of man, and to the perfections of God. It proclaims relief to the miserable, and excludes none but those who exclude themselves. It convinces a sinner that he is unworthy of the smallest mercy, at the same time, that it gives him a confidence to expect the greatest. It cuts off all pretence of glorying in the flesh, but it enables a guilty sinner to glory in God. To them that have no might it encreases strength, it gives eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, subdues the enmity of the heart, shews the nature of sin, the spirituality and sanction of the law with the fullest evidence, and by exhibiting Jesus as made of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption to all who believe, it makes obedience practicable, easy and delightful.

lightful. The constraining love of Christ engages the heart and every faculty in his service. His example illustrates and recommends his precepts, his presence inspires courage and activity under every pressure, and the prospect of the glory to be revealed, is a continual source of joy and peace, which passeth the understanding of the natural man. Thus the gospel filleth the hungry with good things, but it sendeth the rich and self-sufficient empty away, and leaves the impenitent and unbelieving in a state of aggravated guilt and condemnation.

C H A P. III.

Concerning the true Ground of the Opposition our Lord met with in the Course of his Ministry ; and the Objections and Artifices his Enemies employed to prejudice the People against him, and prevent the Reception of his Doctrine.

IF our knowledge of the history of Jesus was confined to the excellence of his character, and the diffusive goodness that shone forth in all his actions ; we should hardly conceive it possible that any people could be so lost to gratitude and humanity, as to oppose him. He went about doing good : He raised the dead, healed every disease, and relieved

the distresses of all who applied to him, without any difference of cases, characters or parties, as the sun, with a rich and unwearied profusion, fills every eye with his light. Wisdom flowed from his lips, and his whole conduct was perfect and inculpable. How natural is it to expect that a person so amiable and benevolent, so blameless and exemplary, should have been universally revered^w!

But we find, in fact, it was far otherwise. Instead of the honours he justly deserved, the returns he met with were reproach, persecution and death. The wonders of his power and goodness were maliciously ascribed to Satan; he was branded as an impostor, madman, and demoniac; he was made the sport of servants and soldiers, and, at length, publicly executed, with every possible circumstance of ignominy and torture, as a malefactor of the worst sort,

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^w The heathen moralists have supposed that there is something so amiable in virtue, that, could it be visible, it would necessarily attract the love and admiration of all beholders. This sentiment has been generally admired; and we need not wonder; since it flatters the pride of man without thwarting his passions. In the Lord Jesus, this great *desideratum* was vouchsafed; virtue and goodness were pleased to become visible, were manifest in the flesh. But did the experiment answer to the ideas of the philosophers? Alas! to the reproach of mankind, Jews and Gentiles conspired to treat him with the utmost contempt. They loved darkness, and therefore could not bear the light. They had more compassion and affection for the most infamous malefactor; therefore, when the alternative was proposed to them, they released Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, and nail'd Jesus and virtue to the cross.

What could be the cause and motives of such injurious treatment? This is the subject of our present enquiry. It might indeed be answered very briefly (as it has been) by ascribing it to the peculiar wickedness and perverseness of the Jews. There is not a fallacy more frequent or pleasing to the minds of men, than while they act contrary to present duty, to please themselves with imagining, how well they would have behaved in another situation, or a different age. They think it a mark of virtue to condemn the wickedness of former times, not aware that they themselves are governed by the same spirit. Thus these very Jews spoke highly of the persons of the prophets, while they rejected their testimony, and blamed their forefathers for shedding innocent blood, at the time they were thirsting for the blood of Jesus*. It is equally easy, at present, to condemn the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, the blindness of the people, and the malice of the priests, who were all personally concerned in the death of Christ. It is easy to think, that if we had seen his works and heard his words, we would not have joined with the multitude in crying, crucify him; though, it is to be feared, many, who thus flatter themselves, have little less enmity against his person and doctrine, than his actual murderers. On this account, I shall give a detail of the true reasons why Christ was opposed in the flesh, and of the measures employed

* Matt. 23. 29, 30.

ployed against him, in order to shew that the same grounds of opposition are deeply rooted in the fallen human nature ; and how probable it is, that if he was to appear again in the same obscure manner, in any country now called by his name, he would meet with little better treatment, unless when the constitution and laws of a civil government might interpose to prevent it.

But it may be proper, in the first place, briefly to delineate the characters of the sects or parties mentioned by the evangelists, whose leaders jointly and separately, both from common and distinct motives opposed our Saviour's ministry, and cavilled at his doctrine. These ⁷ were the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians.

The *Pharisees*, including the Scribes (who were chiefly of this sect) were professedly the guardians of the law, and public teachers of people. They were held in high veneration, by the common people, for the austerity of their deportment, the frequency of their devotions, and their exactness in the less essential parts of the law. They observed the traditions of the Elders, were still adding to them; and the consequence was (as it will always be in such a case) that they were so pleased with their own inventions, as to prefer them to the positive commands of God; and their studious punctuality in trifles, withdrew their regard from the most important duties.

Their

⁷ See Matt. 23. Mark 7. 13. Luke 18. 9—14.

Their specious shew of piety was a fair outside, under which, the grossest abominations were concealed and indulged. They were full of pride, and a high conceit of their own goodness. They fasted and prayed to be seen and esteemed of men. They expected reverence and homage from all, and challenged the highest titles of respect, to be saluted as doctors and masters, and to be honoured with the principal seats in all assemblies. Many of them made their solemn exterior a cloak for extortion and oppression, and the rest, if not hypocrites in the very worst sense, yet deceived both themselves and others by a form of godliness, when they were, in effect, enslaved by their passions, and lived according to the corrupt rule of their own imaginations.

The *Sadducees*, their antagonists and rivals, were equally, though differently, remote from the true knowledge and worship of God. They not only rejected the tradition of the Elders, but a great part of the scriptures likewise, and admitted only the five books of Moses as of divine authority. From this circumstance, together with the difficulty * they proposed to our Lord, and the answer he gave them ; it appears that they were persons, who professing in general terms, to acknowledge a revelation from God, yet made their own prejudices and mistakes, under the dignified name of *reason*, the standard to determine what books should be received as authentic, and in what sense

* Matt. 22. 23. Acts 23. 8.

sense they should be understood. The doctrine of a resurrection did not accord with their notions, therefore they rejected it, together ^a with those parts of scripture which asserted it most expressly. Their question, concerning the seven brethren, seems to have been a trite objection which they had often made, and which had never been answered to satisfaction, 'till our Lord resolved it. But the whole difficulty was founded upon false principles, and when these were removed, all fell to the ground at once. From this, however, we may learn their characteristic, they were the cautious reasoners of those time, who valued themselves on examining every thing closely, refusing to be influenced by the plausible sounds of antiquity and authority.

The *Herodians* ^b were those who endeavoured to ingratiate themselves with Herod. It is most probable that they received their name and distinction, not so much from any peculiar sentiments, as from attempting to accommodate their religion to the circumstances of the times. The Pharisees boasting of their privileges as the children of Abraham, could

^a That the Sadducees received only the law of Moses, is the general opinion; though, I do not say, that it has been either indubitably proved, or universally held. That they put their own sense upon the scriptures (whether in whole or in part) which they did profess to receive, is manifest, from their asserting, that there is no resurrection, neither angel or spirit. A tenet which contradicts not one or a few texts, but the whole strain and tenor both of the law and the prophets. ^b Matt. 22. 16. Mark 3. 6.

could hardly brook a foreign yoke, but the Herodians, from motives of interest, were advocates for Herod and the Roman power. Thus they were opposite to the Pharisees in political matters, as the Sadducees were in points of doctrine. And therefore the question concerning tribute, was proposed to our Lord jointly by the Pharisees and Herodians, the former designing to render him obnoxious to the people, if he allowed of tribute; the latter to accuse him to the government, if he refused it.

From what has been said, it is evident, the leading principles of these sects, were not peculiar to themselves. They may rather be considered universally, as specimens of the different appearances, a religious profession assumes, where the heart is not divinely enlightened and converted to the love of the truth. In all such persons, however high the pretence of religion may be carried, it cannot proceed from a nobler principle, or aim at a nobler object than *self*. These dispositions have appeared in every age and form of the Christian church, and are always active to oppose the selfdenying doctrines of the gospel upon different pretences. The man, who, fond of his fancied attainments, and scrupulous exactness in externals, despises all who will not conform to his rules, and challenges peculiar respect on account of his superior goodness, is a proud *Pharisee*. His zeal is dark, envious, and bitter; his obedience partial and self-willed,
and

and while he boasts of the knowledge of God, his heart rises with enmity at the grace of the gospel, which he boldly charges with opening a door to licentiousness. The modern Sadducee (like those of old) admits of a revelation, but then, full of his own wisdom and importance, he arraigns even the revelation he seems to allow at the bar of his narrow judgment; and as the sublime doctrines of truth pass under his review, he affixes, without hesitation, the epithets of absurd, inconsistent and blasphemous, to whatever thwarts his pride, prejudice and ignorance. And those parts of scripture which cannot be warped to speak his sense, he discards from his canon as interpolated and supposititious. The *Herodian* is the man, however denominated or dignified, who is governed by interest, as the others by pride, and vainly endeavours to reconcile the incompatible services of God and the world, Christ and Belial. He avoids the excesses of religious parties, speaks in term of moderation, and is not unwilling to be accounted the pattern and friend of sobriety and religion. He stands fair with all who would be religious upon cheap terms, and fair in his own esteem, having numbers and authority on his side. Thus he almost persuades himself he has carried his point, and that it is not so impossible to serve two masters, as our Lord's words seem to import. But the preaching of the pure gospel, which enforces the one thing needful, and will

will admit of no compliances with worldly interests, interferes with *his* plan, and incurs *his* resentment likewise; though perhaps he will shew his displeasure, by more refined and specious methods, than the clamorous rage of hot bigotry has patience to wait for.

We now proceed. The first great cause why Jesus was rejected by those to whom he appealed, may be deduced from the tenor of his doctrine, a summary of which has been given in the former chapter. It offended the pride of the Pharises, was repugnant to the wise infidelity of the Sadducees, and condemned the pliant temper of the Herodians. The doctrines of free grace, faith and spiritual obedience, were diametrically opposite to their inclinations. They must have parted with all they admired and loved, if they had complied with him, but this is a sacrifice too great for any to make, who had not deeply felt and known their need of a Saviour. These, on the contrary, were the whole, who saw no want of a physician, and therefore treated his offers with contempt.

Besides, their dislike to his doctrine was increased by his manner of enforcing it. He spoke with authority, and sharply rebuked the hypocrisy, ignorance, ambition, and avarice of those persons who were accounted the wise and the good, who sat in Moses's chair, and had hitherto been heard and obeyed with reverence. But Jesus exposed their true characters,

ractions, he spoke of them as blind guides, he ^d compared them to *painted sepulchres*, and cautioned the people against them as dangerous deceivers. It is no wonder therefore, that on this account, they hated him with a perfect hatred.

Again. They were exceedingly offended with the high character he assumed as the Son of God, and the Messiah. On this account, they condemned him to die for blasphemy. They expected a Messiah indeed, who they professed was spoken of in the Scripture, but they understood not what the scriptures had revealed, either concerning his divine nature, or his voluntary humiliation; that he was to be the son and lord of David, yet a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. They denied his divinity, and themselves unwittingly fulfilled the prophecies that spoke of his sufferings. Affording by their conduct, a memorable proof, how fatally persons may mistake the sense of the words of God, while they profess highly to esteem it.

What farther increased their contempt of his claims, and contributed to harden their hearts more implacably against him, was the obscurity and poverty of his state. While they

^d Matt. 23. 27. Nothing is more loathsome to our senses, than a corpse in the state of putrefaction, or a more striking contrast to the outside of a sumptuous ornamented monument. Perhaps the visible creation does not afford any other image that would so strongly express the true character of hypocrisy and how hateful it appears in the sight of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and before whom all things are naked and open.

they were governed by worldly wisdom and sought not the teaching of God's spirit, they could not but suppose an utter repugnance between the meanness of his condition, and the honours he vindicated to himself. (They expected a Messiah to come in pomp and power, to deliver them from the Roman yoke.) For a person truly divine, who made himself equal with God, to be encompassed with poverty and distress, seemed such profane contradiction, as might justify every mark of indignity they could offer him. And this difficulty must equally affect every unenlightened mind. If *man* had been left to devise in what manner the Lord of the universe would probably descend to dwell a while with poor mortals in a visible form; they would undoubtedly have imagined such a scene (if their thoughts could have reached it) as is described by the prophets on other occasions. The Heavens bowing, the Earth shaking, the Mountains ready to start from their places, and all nature labouring to do homage to her Creator. Or if he came in a milder way, they would at least have contrived an assemblage of all that we conceive magnificent, a pomp and splendor, surpassing all the world ever saw. Expecting nations, crowding to welcome his arrival, and thrones of gold, and palaces of ivory, would have been judged too mean, to accommodate so glorious a guest. But the Lord's thoughts and ways are different from man's. The beloved Son of God, by whom all things were made,

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was born in a stable, and grew up in an obscure and mean condition. He came to suffer and to die for sin, to sanctify poverty and affliction to his people, to set a perfect example of patience and submission, therefore he made himself of no reputation, but took on him the form and offices of a servant. This was the appointment of divine wisdom, but so incredible in the judgment of blinded mortals, that the Apostle assures us, *no man can say^e that Jesus is the Lord*, can perceive and acknowledge his inherent excellence, and authority, through the disgraceful circumstances of his humiliation, *but by the Holy Ghost*. His enemies therefore thought they sufficiently refuted his assertions, by referring to his supposed parents, and the reputed place of his nativity.

Their envy and hatred were still more inflamed, by observing the character of his followers. These were chiefly poor and illiterate persons, and many of them had been notoriously wicked, or accounted so; publicans and sinners, whose names and professions were vile to a proverb. And for such as these, and almost these only, to acknowledge the person whom they refused, and by professing themselves his disciples^f, to set up for being wiser than their teachers; this was a mortification to their pride which they could not bear, especially when they found their number daily to

^e 1. Cor. 12. 3.

^f John 7. 49. 9. 34.

to encrease, and therefore could not but fear their own influence would proportionably decline.

Once more. Mistaking the nature of his kingdom, which he often spoke of, they opposed him from reasons of state. They feared, or pretended to fear, that if they suffered him to go on, the increase of his disciples would give umbrage to the Romans who would come and take away both their places and their nation*. Some perhaps really had this apprehension, but it was more generally a pretence, which the leaders made use of to alarm the ignorant. They were, in truth, impatient of the Roman yoke, prone to tumults, and ready to listen to every deceiver who promised them deliverance, under pretence of being their expected Messiah. But from enmity and opposition to Jesus, they became loyal at once. So they might accomplish their designs against him, they were content to forget other grievances, and openly professed, they would have no other king but Cæsar.

These were some of the chief motives, which united the opposite interests and jarring sentiments of the Jewish sects, against our blessed Lord. We are next to consider the methods they employed to prejudice the multitudes against him. The bulk of the common people, seldom think for themselves in re-

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John 6. 48.

ligious concerns, but judge it sufficient to give up their understandings and consciences to their professed ^h teachers. They are, however, for the most part more unprejudiced and open to conviction than their guides, whose reputation and interest are more nearly concerned to maintain every established error, and to stop up every avenue, by which truth and reformation might enter. The Jewish people, uninfluenced by the proud and selfish views of the priests and rulers, readily honoured the ministry of Christ, and attended him in great multitudes. If they did not enter into the grand design of his mission, they at least gave him testimonies of respect. When Jesus caused the ⁱ dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see, they glorified the God of Israel, saying, a great prophet is risen up amongst us, God has visited his people. Now, what was to be done in this case? Would the Scribes and Pharisees stand unconcerned? No, it is said in several places, they were filled with indignation ^k, and essayed every means, to bring his person and miracles into disrepute. The methods they used, are worthy

^h This is much to be lamented, for if the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch? Matt. 15. 14. When the blind lead the blind, how indeed can it be otherwise, if the former imagine they *see*, and the latter are content to be *led*! alas for the people that are in such a case, alas for their guides! ⁱ Matt. 15. 31. Luke 7. 16. ^k It is a strong symptom of hypocrisy and enmity to the gospel, to be offended with any new and remarkable displays of divine grace.

worthy of notice, having been often repeated since (as to their substance) against the servants of Christ.

1. They availed themselves of a popular mistake, concerning his birth. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, according to the scriptures, but being removed from thence in his infancy, to avoid Herod's cruelty, and his parents afterwards living at Nazareth in Galilee, he was supposed by many, to have been born there. Even Nathaniel was prejudiced by this mistake, but happily yielded to Philip's advice to examine for himself. But it prevented many from enquiring much about Jesus, and therefore his enemies made the most of it, and confidently appealed to the scripture, when it seemed to decide in their favour. ^b Search and look, for out of Galilee, ariseth no prophet. It is probable, many were staggered with this objection, and thought it sufficient to invalidate all his discourses and miracles, since let him say and do what he would, he could not possibly be the Messiah, if he was born in Galilee.

2. They urged that he could not be of God, because he infringed the law of Moses, and broke the sabbath. This, though it may seem a groundless objection to us, was not so to many at that time, who knew not the spiritual design and meaning of the law, and, perhaps, he had not the opportunity to hear our

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Lord

^b John 7. 42. 52.

Lord ^b vindicate himself. They urged this vehemently against the force of a notorious miracle, and not without some colour from the words of Moses ^c himself; who had warned them to beware of false teachers, though they should confirm their doctrine by signs and wonders.

3. They reproached the freedom of his conversation. Jesus was of easy access, and condescended to converse and eat with any who invited him. He neither practised, nor enjoyed the austerities, which carry the air of superior sanctity in the judgment of weak and superstitious minds. They therefore stiled him a glutton ^d and wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners; that is (as they intended it) a companion with them, and a conniver at their wickedness. Nothing could be more false and slanderous than this charge, or more easily refuted, if the people would examine closely. But as it came from teachers, who were highly revered for mortification, and as Jesus was usually attended by many, with whom, it was thought infamous to associate, it could not but have great weight with the credulous and indolent.

4. They laid much stress upon the mean condition of his followers. They were mostly ^e Galileans, a people of small estimation, and of the lowest rank, fishermen or publicans. While on the other hand, few or none of the rulers or Pharisees who were presumed to be best

^b John 9. 16. ^c Deut. 13. 2. ^d Luke 7. 34.

best qualified^e to judge of his pretensions, had believed on him. Those who are acquainted with human nature, cannot but know, how strongly this appeal to the judgment of persons eminent for their learning or station, operates upon minds who have no better criterion of truth. How could a Jew, who had been from his infancy superstitiously attached to the Pharisees, suppose, that these eminently devout men, who spent their lives in the study of the law, would have rejected Jesus, if he had been a good man?

5. When notwithstanding all their surmises, multitudes still professed high thoughts of Jesus, beholding his wonderful works; they proceeded with the most blasphemous effrontery to defame the miracles they could not deny, and maliciously ascribed them to the agency of the Devil^f. This pertinacious resistance to the conviction, both of their senses and consciences, was the highest stage of impiety, and constituted their sin (as our Lord assured them) unpardonable. Not that any sin considered in itself, is too great for the blood of Jesus to expiate, but as they utterly renounced and scorned his mediation, there remained no other sacrifice, but they were judicially given up to incurable impenitence and hardness of heart. Yet it is probable, that even this black assertion, was not without influence upon some, who were wedded to their sins, and therefore

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^e John 7. 48.

^f Matt. 12. 14:]

glad of any pretext, how unreasonable soever, to refuse the testimony of truth.

6. Another means they made use of (the last we shall enumerate) and not the least effectual to intimidate the minds of the people from acknowledging Jesus, was the convincing argument of violence and ill treatment. Having the power in their hands, they employed it against his followers, and made an agreement, that whoever confessed he was Christ, should be put out of the ^d Synagogue, that is, *excommunicated*. This decree seems to have been made by the Sanhedrim, or great council, and to imply not meerly an exclusion from the rites of public worship, but likewise a positive punishment, equivalent to an *outlawry* with us. The fear of incurring this penalty, restrained the parents of the ^e man born blind, and prevented many others, who were in their hearts convinced that he was the Messiah, from owning him as such. They loved the world, they preferred the praise of men to the praise of God, and therefore remained silent and neuter.

From such motives, and by such methods, our Lord was resisted and opposed by the heads of the Jewish nation. The scribes and teachers, to whom the key of knowledge was by authority committed, disdained to use it themselves, and those who were willing, they hindered. Had they been wise and faithful, they would have directed the people to Christ, but on the contrary, they darkened the plainest scriptures,

^d John 9. 22.

^e John 12. 42.

scriptures, and perverted the clearest facts, to prevent (if possible) his reception. In vain he spoke as never man spoke, and multiplied the wonders of his power and love in their presence. In vain to them.—They pursued him with unwearied subtlety² and malice, traduced him to the people and to the government, and would be satisfied with nothing less than his death. So obstinate and wicked is the heart of man, so fatal are the prejudices of pride and worldly interest. For as we observed before, these tempers were not peculiar to the Jews: they are essential to depraved nature, and operate universally, where the grace of God does not make a difference. To this hour, the gospel of Christ is opposed upon the same grounds, and by the like artifices, as were once employed against his person.

The doctrines which his faithful ministers deduce and enforce from the written word, are no other than what he himself taught, namely, a declaration of his personal honours and authority, of the insufficiency of formal worship, in which the heart is not concerned, of the extent and spirituality of the law of God, and of salvation, freely proclaimed to the miserable, through faith in his name. The self-righteous, the self-wise, and all who
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² Mark 12. 13. They sent unto him certain of the Pharisees to catch him. *Αγρευω* expresses the art and assiduity of sportsmen, in the various methods they use to ensnare, entangle, or destroy their game. It well suits the spirit and design of our Lord's enemies, in the question proposed, and is finely contrasted by the meekness and wisdom of his answer,

are devoted to the pleasures and honours of the world, have each their particular exceptions to these truths. The wisdom of God they account foolishness, and the language of their hearts is, we will not have this man to reign over us. And the success of these doctrines, which is chiefly visible among such as they have been accustomed to despise, is equally offensive: yet so inconsistent are they, that if here and there, a few persons who were before eminent for their rank, attainments, or morality, are prevailed on to account all things but loss and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord, this, instead of removing their first objection, excites their rage and contempt still more.

And as the motives of their hatred, so their methods of expressing it, are the same. They are not ashamed to adopt and exaggerate the most vulgar misconceptions; they set the scripture at variance with itself, and while they pass over the plainest and most important passages unnoticed, they dwell upon a few texts of more dubious import, and therefore more easily accommodated to their sense; with these they flourish and triumph, and affect an high zeal in defence of the word of God. They reproach the pure gospel as licentious, because it exposes the vanity of their singularities, and will worship, and are desirous to bind heavier burthens upon mens shoulders, which few of themselves will touch with one of their fingers. They enlarge on the weakness and ignorance

ignorance of those who mostly receive the new doctrine, and entrench themselves under the sanction of learned and dignified names. They even venture to explode and vilify the evident effects of God's grace, and ascribe the agency of his spirit to enthusiasm, infatuation and madness, if not expressly to diabolical influence. And lastly, so far as divine providence permits, they shew themselves actuated by the primitive spirit of oppression and violence, in persuing the faithful followers of the truth with censures and penalties.

But let who will rage, and imagine vain things, Jesus is the King in Zion. He is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever. There were a happy few in the days of his flesh, who beheld his glory, trusted on him for salvation, and attended him amidst the many reproaches and sufferings he endured from sinners. Of these, his first witnesses, we are to speak in the following chapter. His gospel likewise, though opposed by many, and slighted by more, is never preached in vain. To some, it will always be the power and wisdom of God, they know in whom they have believed, and therefore are not ashamed to appear in his cause against all disadvantages. Supported and encouraged by his spirit, they go on from strength to strength, and are successively made more than conquerors, by his blood, and the word of his testimony.

CHAP. IV.

Observations on the calling and characters of our Lord's Apostles, and Disciples, previous to his ascension.

FROM what has been observed in the preceding chapters, it is evident, that those who assert a principle of free-will in man, sufficiently enabling him to chuse and determine for himself, when the truths of the gospel are plainly laid before him, do thereby (so far as in them lies) render the salvation of mankind highly precarious, if not utterly hopeless and impracticable. Notwithstanding God was pleased to send his own son with a gracious message, notwithstanding his whole life was a series of wonders, and all his actions discovered a wisdom, power, and goodness, answerable to his high character; notwithstanding the time, manner, and design of his appearance and sufferings, had been clearly foretold; yet, so far as a judgment can be made from the event, he would certainly have lived and died in vain, without influence or honour, without leaving a single disciple, if the same grace that provided the means of redemption, had not engaged to make them effectual, by preparing and disposing the hearts of sinners to receive him.

In the account given us by the Evangelists, of those who professed themselves his disciples,

we may discern, as in miniature, the general methods of his grace, and comparing his personal ministry, with the effects of his gospel, in all succeeding times, we may be assured that the work and the power, are still the same. The choice he made of his disciples, the manner of their calling, their characters, and even their defects and failings; in a word, all that is recorded concerning them, is written for our instruction, and is particularly useful to teach us the true meaning of what passes within our own observation.

1. Several things are worthy our notice in this view, with respect to the *choice* of his disciples.

1. They were comparatively very few. He was indeed usually attended by multitudes in the different places where he preached, because he spoke with a power they had never met with before, and because he healed the sick, fed the hungry, and did good to all. But he had very few constant followers. Those who assembled at Jerusalem after his ascension, are said to have been but about 120^a; and when he appointed his disciples a solemn meeting in Galilee, informing them beforehand, of the time and place where he would come to them, the number that then met here, is expressed by the apostle, to have been more than^b 500. We can hardly suppose

^a Acts 1. 15. ^b 1 Cor. 15. 6. The word *brethren* there used, does not prove that none but men were present at that time, any more than that, because the apostles,

pose that any who loved him, and were able to travel, would have been absent upon so interesting an occasion; but how small a company was this, if compared with the many thousands, among whom he had conversed in all the cities and villages, through which he had passed, preaching the gospel, and performing innumerable miracles, for more than three years! Well might the prophet say, *who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?* But since he, in whom the fulness of grace resided, had so few disciples, it may lessen our surprize, that his gospel, though in itself the power and wisdom of God, should meet with so cold a reception amongst men, as it has in fact always done.

2. Of those few, who professed a more entire attachment to his person, a considerable part, after attending him for some time, went back and walked no more with him. They were but superficially convinced, and rather struck with the power of his words and works, than deeply sensible of their own need of him. When therefore, upon a certain occasion, he spoke of the more inward and experimental part of religion, the life of faith, and the necessity of eating his flesh, and drinking his blood,

bles, in their publick preaching, addressed their hearers as Men and Brethren; there were therefore no women amongst them, or the women were not considered, as having any interest or concern in the gospel ministry.

blood, so many were offended at his doctrine, and forsook ^b him, that he said unto the twelve, *will ye also go away?* Which seems to imply, that there were few but these remaining. Therefore, though we see at present, that where the sound of the gospel brings multitudes together, many, who for a season appeared in earnest, gradually decline in their profession, and, at length, wholly return to their former ways, we have the less reason to wonder, or be discouraged, remembering that it was thus from the beginning.

3. Those who believed on Christ then, were chiefly (as we had occasion to observe before) persons of low condition, and many of them had been formerly vile and obnoxious in their conduct. While the wise and learned rejected him, his more immediate followers were Galileans, fishermen, publicans and sinners. This was observed and urged to his reproach and theirs, and the like offence has always attended his gospel. But what enrages his enemies, fills the hearts and mouths of his poor people with praise. They ^c adore his condescension in taking notice of the most unworthy, and admire the efficacy of his grace in making those who were once wretched slaves to Satan, a free and willing people in the day of his power.

4. But this was not universally the case. Though not many wise, rich or noble, were called

^b John 6. 66. 67.

^c Luke 1. 52. 53.

called, there were some, even of these. His grace triumphed over every circumstance of life. Zaccheus was a rich man^e, Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews, Joseph an honourable counsellor. We also read of a nobleman, or courtier, who believed with all his house. In every age, likewise, there have been some persons of distinguished eminence, for birth, honours, and abilities, who have cheerfully engaged in the profession of a despised gospel, though they have thereby incurred a double share of opposition from the men of the world, especially from those of their own rank. The number of these has been always sufficient to confute those who would insinuate, that the gospel is only suited to the taste of the vulgar and ignorant; yet it has always been so small as to make it evident, that the truth is not supported by the wisdom or influence of men, but by the power and providence of God.

5. It is farther observable, that several of our Lord's few disciples were under previous connections amongst themselves. Peter^f and Andrew were brothers, as likewise James and John, and these together with Philip, and perhaps

* Zaccheus was a chief or principal publican, to whom the rest were accountable; a commissioner of the revenue. *And he was rich.* The greek is more expressive, *and this was a rich man.* Luke xix. 2. Perhaps alluding to what had past a little before Chap. xviii. 25. This remark is added to remind us, that what is impossible with men, is easy to him, who can speak to the heart and turn it as he will.

^f John i. 40.

perhaps Nathaniel, seem to have been all of one ^s town ^h. The other James, and Jude, were also brethren. So it is said, Jesus loved Mary, and her Sister, and Lazarus, three in one house; when perhaps, the whole place hardly afforded a fourth: and more in a single village, than were to be found in many larger cities taken together. This circumstance more strongly marked the discrimination of his grace, in making the means effectual, where, and to whom he pleased. Such has been the usual event of his gospel since. It is proclaimed to all, but accepted by few; and of these, several are often found in one family, while their next door neighbours account it a burden and offence. It flourishes here and there ^h in a few places, while those of the adjacent country are buried in more than Egyptian darkness, and resist the endeavours of those who would invite them to partake of the same benefits. Thus the Lord is pleased to display his own sovereignty, in raising and sending forth his ministers, when and where he sees fit, and in

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^s Comp. Mark i. 16. Luke 5. 10. with John i. 44, 45. These six, and more than these, were fishermen. John 21. 2. and such they continued, *only their net success, and capture were so much changed, that it became a new calling.* He made them fishers of men. In the fishermen's calling, there is required a certain dexterity, much patience, and a readiness to bear hardships. Perhaps, many observations they made in their former business, were useful to them afterwards. And the Lord still brings up his servants so, that the remembrance of former years (the years of ignorance) becomes a rule and encouragement in future and different scenes of life. ^h Amos. iv. 7.

determining the subjects and measure of their success. If others dispute and ⁱ cavil against this procedure, those who believe, have cause to adore his goodness to themselves. And a day is at hand, when every mouth shall be stopped that would contend with the just judge of all the earth. The impenitent and unbelieving, will not then dare to charge him with injustice for dealing with them according to their own counsels and desires, inasmuch as when the light of truth was ready to break upon them, they chose darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

2. In the calling of our Lord's disciples, and the manner in which they were brought to know and serve him, we may discover the same variety as, at this day, appears in the conversion of sinners by the preaching of the gospel.

Some

ⁱ See Rom. II. 23. There are but few who dispute upon the subject of the Divine Decrees, with that reverence and caution St. Paul expresses. In chap. 9, when an objection was started, he cuts it short with, *But who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?* And here he breaks off abruptly with, *O the depth!* He seems to have followed the narrow winding streams of human reasoning, 'till he finds himself unawares upon the brink of an ocean that has neither bounds nor bottom. And every word expresses the reverence and astonishment with which his mind was filled. The wisdom of the divine counsels in their first plan, the knowledge of their extensive consequences in this world, in all worlds, in time, and in eternity. The riches of that wisdom and knowledge, the depth of those riches. His counsels inaccessible, his proceedings untraceable. All is wonderful in St. Paul's view. How different this from the trifling, arrogant spirit of too many upon this topic!

Some from a religious education, an early acquaintance with the scriptures, and the secret influence of the spirit of God upon their hearts, are gradually prepared for the reception of the truth. They read, and strive, and pray, they feel an uneasiness and a want which they know not how to remedy. They are sincerely desirous to know and do the will of God, and yet through misapprehension, and the influence of popular prejudice, they are for a season withheld from the means that would relieve them. But, at length, the preaching of the gospel explains to them the meaning of their former exercises, exactly answers to the state of their minds, and thereby brings its own evidence. Similar to this, was the case of Nathaniel: When our Lord referred him to what had passed under the fig tree, where he had thought himself alone and unobserved, his doubts and scruples vanished in an instant. There is little doubt but Nathaniel had been praying under the fig-tree, and probably desiring a further knowledge of the prophecies, and their accomplishment in the Messiah. He had heard of Jesus, but could not fully clear up the objections made against him, but now he was convinced and satisfied in a moment.

The attention of some is drawn by what they see and hear around them. They form a favourable opinion of the gospel from the remarkable effects it produces. But their first enquiries are damped by difficulties which

they cannot easily get over, and they are ready to say, How can these things be? Their interests and connections in life are a farther hindrance, the fear of man which bringeth a snare is a great restraint upon their enquiries; but now and then, when they can venture without being noticed, they seek farther instruction. Now, though this hesitating spirit, which pays so much deference to worldly regards in the search of truth, is highly blameable, yet the Lord, who is rich in mercy, is often pleased to produce a happy and abiding change from such imperfect beginnings. As they increase in knowledge they gain more courage, and in time arrive to a comfortable experience and open profession of the truth. Thus it was with Nicodemus, he was at first ignorant and fearful, but his interview with Jesus, by night, had a good effect. He afterwards ventured to speak more publiclyⁱ in his favour, though still he did not join himself to the disciples. But the circumstances of Christ's death freed him from all fear, and inspired him to attempt the most obnoxious service, when the apostles themselves were afraid to be seen^k.

Others are first prompted to hear the gospel from no higher motive than curiosity; but going as mere spectators, they find themselves retained as parties unawares. The word of God, powerful and penetrating as a two-edged sword, discovers the thoughts and intents of their

ⁱ John 7. 50.^k John 19. 39.

their hearts, presses upon their consciences, and seems addressed to themselves alone. The sentiments they carry away with them are far different from those they brought, and a change in their whole deportment immediately takes place. Such was the case of Zaccheus¹, he had heard much of Jesus and desired to see him; for this end, he ran before and climbed a tree, from whence he proposed to behold him unobserved. But how great must his surprize and emotion have been, when Jesus, whom he had considered as a stranger, looked up, called him by his name, and invited himself to his house.

Some are drawn by the report of others freely declaring what the Lord has done for their souls. The relation awakens in them desires after him which are not disappointed, for he is rich enough to satisfy all who seek to him. So the Samaritans, whose expectations were first raised by the woman's declaration, *“Come and see a man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?”* had soon a more convincing testimony, and could say, *“Now we believe, not because of thy word, but we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”*

To a few, the first impulses of divine grace come suddenly and unthought-of, when their hearts and hands are engaged quite another way: As Saul, who was seeking his father's

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affes,

¹ Luke 19. 5. ^m John 4. 42.

asses, received the unexpected news of a kingdom. A ray of truth pierces their minds like lightening, and disposes them to leave their schemes unfinished to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness only. ^u Thus our Lord passed by the sons of Zebedee when mending their nets, and ^o Matthew while busied at the receipt of custom. He only said, *Follow me*, he used no arguments, he proposed no rewards, but he spoke to their hearts, and by the constraining power of his love engaged them to a chearful and immediate obedience.

Afflictions likewise are now, no less than formerly, a happy means to bring many to Jesus. He prepares them for heavenly blessings by embittering or removing their creature-comforts. Had they continued in prosperity, they would not have thought of him, but the loss of health, or friends, or substance, disappointments in life, or a near prospect of death, constrain them in good-earnest to seek for one able to deliver them. In the time of their distress they say, *Arise and save us*. Not that afflictions in themselves can produce this turn of thought. Too many in such circumstances toss like a wild bull in a net; but when he sends afflictions for this purpose, they accomplish that which he pleases. Thus, when he was upon earth, many who came or were brought ^p to him for the relief of bodily disorders, experienced a double cure. ^q He healed their diseases,

^u Mark 1. 16, 19. ^o Mark 2. 14. ^p Mark 2. 9,
^q John 9. 7—36—38.

eases, and pardoned their sins. At the same time that he restored the ^r blind to sight, he opened the eyes of their minds. He sometimes made the afflictions of one, the means to bring a whole family to the knowledge of his grace. A considerable part of his followers were such as these, whom he had graciously relieved from distresses incurable by any hand but his. Some had been long and grievously tormented, had essayed every means, but found themselves worse and worse till they applied to him; and having known the happy effects of his Power and Compassion, they would leave him no more.

Lastly, we sometimes meet with instances of his mercy and ability to save even to the uttermost, in the unhopèd-for conversion of desperate and hardened sinners, who have gone on with a high hand, regardless of mercies, warnings and judgments, 'till they seemed past conviction, and given up to a reprobate mind. Their state resembles that of the Demoniac, Luke 8. They are so entirely under the power of the Devil (though perhaps they vainly boast of freedom) that no arguments, no motives, no resolutions can restrain them within bounds; but they break through every tie of nature, conscience and reason, and are restless drudges in the service of sin, though they feel themselves miserable at present, and see inevitable ruin before their eyes. Yet even this case is not too hard for him on whom

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the sinners help is laid. He can dispossess the legion with a word, he can take the prey from the mighty, and deliver the lawful captive, bind the strong one-armed, and divide his spoil. Happy change, when the power of grace not only sets the soul at liberty from sin and Satan, but puts it in possession of what were lately the instruments of its slavery! when all the powers and faculties of body and mind are redeemed to the Lord's use, and the experience of past evil is made conducive to future comfort and advantage! Such an instance was that great sinner, that penitent, believing, happy soul, of whom it is emphatically remarked, * *She loved much, because much had been forgiven her.* Sometimes the deliverance is deferred 'till near the period of life. The poor wretch, labouring under the pangs or dread of death, and trembling at the apprehension of falling into the hands of the living God, is snatched as a brand out of the fire; he receives faith in a suffering Saviour, and feels the power of atoning blood; his terrors cease, and joy succeeds, a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Thus the expiring malefactor † was converted upon the cross, and received an infallible assurance of Salvation.

3. The characters of our Lord's disciples, with the account we have of their defects and failings, may farther illustrate the history of his church and gospel, and afford an apology for

* Luke 7. 47. † Luke 23. 43.

for the blemishes, which through human infirmity, do, more or less, attend the prevalence of his doctrines.

The grace of God has a real influence upon the whole man. It enlightens the understanding, directs the will, purifies the affection, regulates the passions, and corrects the different excesses to which different persons are by constitution or habit inclined. Yet it seldom wholly changes the complexion or temper of the animal frame. It does not impart any new natural powers, though it teaches the use and improvement of those we have received. It will dispose us to seek instruction, make us open to conviction, and willing to part with our prejudices, so far and so soon as we discover them, but it will not totally and instantaneously remove them. Hence there are a great variety of characters in the Christian life, and the several graces of the spirit, as zeal, love, meekness, faith, appear with peculiar advantage in different subjects; yet so, that every commendable property is subject to its particular inconvenience. Perfection cannot be found in fallen man. The best are sometimes blameable, and the wisest often mistaken. Warm and active tempers, though influenced, in the main, by the noble ambition of pleasing God in all things, are apt to overshoot themselves, and to discover a resentment and keenness of spirit which cannot be wholly justified. Others of a more fixed and sedate temper, though less subject
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to this extreme, are prone to its opposite; their gentleness degenerates into indolence, their caution into cowardice. The principle of self, likewise, which, though subdued, is not eradicated, will, in some instances appear. Add to this, the unknown access and influence which the evil spirits have upon our minds, the sudden and new emergencies which surprise us into action before we have had time to deliberate, with many other considerations of a like nature, and it will be no wonder that some things are always amiss^u, in the best and most successful attempts to promote the glory of God and the good of souls. And it is farther to be noted, that some individuals will be found, who, though seemingly engaged in the same good work, and, for a time, pretending to much zeal, are essentially defective in their hearts and views; and when, at length, their true characters are exposed, the world, who either cannot or will not distinguish, charge the faults of a few upon a whole profession; as, in the former case, they wound the character of a good man for unavoidable and involuntary mistakes. We shall therefore shew, that either the exceptions

^u A lukewarm, cautious spirit, can easily avoid and readily censure the mistakes and faults of those, who, fired with an honest warmth for the honour of God, and the good of souls, are sometimes transported beyond the bounds of strict prudence. But though the best intention cannot make that right which is wrong in itself, yet the zeal, diligence and disinterested aim of such persons are worthy of our esteem.

ceptions made, and so loudly reverberated in our ears against the gospel doctrine, on these accounts, are unjust, or that there was sufficient cause to reject and condemn our Lord and his apostles for the same reasons.

The character of Peter is marked with admirable propriety and consistence by the evangelists. He every where appears like himself. Earnestly devoted to his master's person, and breathing an honest warmth for his service, he was, in a manner, the eye, the hand, the mouth of the apostles. He was the first to ask, to answer, to propose and to execute. He made a noble confession, for which our Lord honoured him with a peculiar commendation. He waited but for a command to walk to him upon the water. He was not afraid to expose himself in his Lord's defence, when he was surrounded and apprehended by his enemies. And though, in this last instance, his affection was ill-expressed, yet his motive was undoubtedly praiseworthy. His Heart flamed with zeal and love, and therefore he was always forward to distinguish himself.

But the warmth of Peter's temper often betrayed him into great difficulties, and shewed that the grace he had received was consistent with many imperfections. Though he sincerely loved Christ, and had forsaken all for him, he was, at one time, so ignorant of the true design of his incarnation, that he was angry and impatient to hear him speak of his sufferings,

sufferings, and brought upon himself a most severe rebuke. Not content with the ordinary services allotted to him, he offered himself to unnecessary trials, as in the above instance, when he pressed to walk upon the water. The event shewed him his own weakness and insufficiency, yet his self-confidence revived and continued. When our Lord warned him again and again of his approaching fall, he thought and boldly affirmed that it was impossible. He was sincere in his protestation, but the actual experiment was necessary to convince and humble him. Accordingly, when left to himself, he fell before the first temptation. And here the impetuosity of his temper was still manifest. He did not stop at a simple denial of Jesus, he confirmed it by an oath^w, and, at length, proceeded to utter bitter imprecations against himself, if he so much as knew him, whom he had seen transfigured in glory upon the mount, and prostrate in an agony in the garden. Such was the weakness and inconsistency of this prince of the apostles.

None of these excesses appeared in the conduct of the traitor *Judas*. He was so circumspect and reserved, that we do not find any of the disciples had the least suspicion of him.

^w Mark 14. 71. *He began to curse and swear.* *Αναθεματίζειν*—To imprecate the most dreadful curses upon himself, and call solemnly on God to execute them. This was indeed the most probable method to free himself from the suspicion of being a disciple of Jesus, for no such language had been, 'till then, heard among his followers.

him. But whilst his heart was full of wickedness, he could find fault with others, and charge their best expressions of love with indiscretion. When Mary anointed our Lord's feet with ointment*, he was displeased at the waste, and professed a warm concern for the poor; but we are told the true reason of his œconomy: It was not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, which contained the common stock, entrusted to him. The *charge* of the bag is an office full of temptation; and an *attachment* to the bag has been often at the bottom of many censures and misrepresentations which have been thrown out against the people of God. It has been, and it will be so; but the Lord has appointed that where-ever the gospel should be preached to the end of the world, this action of Mary, with the observation of Judas upon it, and the motive from which he made it, should be handed down together, that we may not be discouraged at things of the same kind. Without doubt, the treason of Judas and his unhappy end, after having maintained a fair character so long, and shared with the rest in the honours of the apostleship, were to them an occasion of grief, and afforded their enemies a subject of reproach and triumph. But we may believe one reason why our Lord chose Judas, and continued him so long with his disciples, to have been, that we might learn by this awful instance not to be

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* John 12. 5, 6.

surprised if some, who have made a shew in the church, been chosen to important offices, and furnished with excellent gifts, do in the end prove hypocrites and traitors: *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

A desire of pre-eminence and distinction is very unsuitable to the followers of Jesus, who made himself the servant of all; very unbecoming the best of the children of men, who owe their breath to the mercy of God, have nothing that they can call their own, and have been unfaithful in the improvement of every talent. We allow that every appearance of this is a blemish in the Christian character, and especially in a Christian minister; but if on some occasion, and in some degree, human infirmity has wrought this way, though no example can justify it, yet those, who through ignorance of their own hearts, are too rigid censurers of others, may be reminded that this evil frequently discovered itself in the apostles. They often disputed who should be the greatest; and when our Lord was speaking of his approaching sufferings, two of them chose that unseasonable time to preclude the rest, and petitioned that they might have the chief seats in his kingdom. The first offence was theirs; but when the ten heard it, they were all moved with indignation, and shewed themselves equally desirous of superiority. It is plain therefore, that unless the apostles were hypocrites and mercenaries, some transient escapes of this sort (though confessedly criminal

nal and indecent) are no sure proofs that such a person is not in the main sincere, disinterested, and truly devoted to the service of God and his gospel.

No less contrary to the meek and gracious spirit of Jesus, is an angry zeal, expressing itself in terms of ill-will and bitterness to those who oppose or injure us. One of the highest attainments and brightest evidences of true grace, is from a sense of the love and example of Christ, to shew bowels of mercy and long suffering to all men, and by perseverance in well-doing to overcome evil with good. And a contrary behaviour (if frequent and notorious) will, like a dead fly in precious ointment, destroy the favour, if not the efficacy, of all we can attempt for the service of God in the world. However, if repeated falsehoods and studied provocations do sometimes in an unguarded moment extort from the disciples of Christ such expressions and marks of displeasure, as in their cooler hours they willingly retract and sincerely repent of before God; this ought not to be exaggerated beyond bounds, as an offence inconsistent with their profession, at least not by any who would be afraid to speak dishonourably of the apostles James and John, who once went so far in their anger ^y as to demand that fire might be sent from heaven to devour their adversaries.

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^y Luke 9. 54. They thought they were influenced by a commendable zeal for their master, and that their proposal was warranted by an authorised precedent. We do
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We might proceed to other particulars, but enough has been said to shew the general resemblance which the preaching of the gospel in later times bears to our Lord's personal ministry: The doctrine is the same, the effects the same. It was, and it is to many, *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*. The opposition it has met with has been always owing to the same evil principles of pride and the love of sin, which are latent in every unrenewed heart: Though the pretexts are various, they may be reduced to a few leading motives, which are always at work. The professors of this gospel have at no time been very numerous, if compared with those who have rejected it; and of these, too many have dishonoured or forsaken it. Neither have those, who have received it most cordially, and been most desirous to adorn and promote it, been wholly exempt from mistakes and imperfections. The tenor of their conduct has proved them partakers of a more excellent spirit than others, their faith in Jesus has not been an empty notion, but fruitful of good works, such as no man

not find that they ever wished for fire to consume the Scribes and Pharisees, who were Christ's most inveterate enemies. But when the Samaritans rejected him, the vile Samaritans, whom they, upon a national prejudice, had been accustomed to hate; then their hearts deceived them, and they indulged their own corrupt passions, while they supposed they were animated by a zeal for Christ. Are we not often deceived in the same way? Can we not silently bear, or ingenuously extenuate, the faults and mistakes of our own party; while we are all zeal and emotion, to expose, censure and condemn what is amiss in others?

man could do except God was with him. They have been governed by higher motives and devoted to nobler aims, than the world can either understand or bear—yet they are deeply conscious of inherent infirmity, and sometimes (to their great grief) they give too visible proofs of it, which their watchful adversaries are glad to aggravate and charge upon them as consequences of their doctrine. This should induce all who love the Lord Jesus, to redouble their guard, and to pray with David that they may be led in the right way because of their observers. If the question is concerning the infirmities, or even the vices of others, almost every one is ready to plead in their behalf; allowances are freely and largely made for human frailty, and none are willing to be thought harsh or censorious. But the believer in Jesus must look for no abatement or extenuation; even the professed admirers of candour and charity will not hesitate to put the worst construction upon all he says or does; for they are seeking occasion to wound the gospel through his misconduct. They are sensible that he is generally above them, and therefore rejoice to find or pretend a flaw, on which they may expatiate, to reduce him as near as possible to their own level. Though if their censures are extended to their just consequence, they will (as we have seen) fall hard upon the apostles themselves.

I hope that what I have said upon this subject will neither be misunderstood nor perverted.

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We do not defend even the infirmities of the best men; much less would we provide a plea for persecution or ambition. Let not the man who supposes gain to be godliness, who makes the gospel a ladder whereby to climb the heights of worldly preferment, whose heart like the insatiable fire is craving more, and practising every art to accumulate wealth and honour in the church;—Let not the proud man, who would lord it over conscience, and though unable to command fire from heaven, would gladly prepare fire and slaughter upon earth for all who will not venture their souls upon his faith;—Let not these avail themselves of the examples of James and John: But rather let them tremble at the reflection, that while they manifest no part of the apostles graces, they are entirely possessed of those tempers, the smallest traces of which our Lord so severely rebuked in his disciples.

The first believers, though not faultless, were sincere: The natural disposition of their hearts was changed; they believed in Jesus, they loved him, they devoted themselves to his service, they submitted to his instructions, shared in his reproach, and could not be either enticed or intimidated to leave him. Their gracious master was their guide and guard, their advocate and counsellor; when they were in want, in danger, in trouble, or in doubt, they applied to him, and found relief; hence, they learned by degrees, to cast all their care upon him. He corrected every wrong disposition,
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he pardoned their failings and enabled them to do better. His precepts taught them true wisdom, and his own example, which, to those who loved him, had the force of a thousand precepts, was at once the model and the motive of their obedience. To make them ashamed of aspiring to be chief, he himself, though Lord of all, conversed among them as a servant, and condescended to wash their feet: To teach them forbearance and gentleness to their opposers; they saw him weep over his bitterest enemies, and heard him pray for his actual murderers.

Thus they gradually advanced in faith, love, and holiness, as the experience of every day disclosed to them some new discovery of the treasures of wisdom, grace, and power, residing in their Lord and Saviour: He explained to them in private the difficulties which occurred in his more public discourses; by his observations on the common occurrences of life, he opened to them the mysterious volumes of creation and providence, which none but those whom he vouchsafes to teach can understand aright: He prayed for them and with them, and taught them to pray for themselves: He revealed unto them the unseen realities of the eternal world, and supported them under the prospect of approaching trials; particularly of his departure from them, by assuring them that he was going on their behalf, to prepare them a place in his kingdom, and that in a little time he would

return to receive them to himself, that they might dwell with him for ever.

What he personally spoke to them, and acted in their presence, was recorded by his direction, and has been preserved by his providence for the use and comfort of his church: Though his enemies have raged horribly, they have not been able to suppress the divine volume; and though invisible to mortal eyes, he is still near to all that seek him, and so supplies the want of his bodily presence by the secret communications of his spirit, that his people have no reason to complain of any disadvantage: Though they see him not, they believe, love, rejoice and obey; their attention and dependance are fixed upon him, they entrust him with all their concerns, they rely upon his promises, they behold him as their high priest, advocate and shepherd, they live upon his fulness, and plead his righteousness, and they find and feel that their reliance is not in vain.

The disciples were content for his sake to bear the scorn and injurious treatment of the world: They expected no better usage, nor desired an higher honour, than to be fellow-sufferers with their Lord. When he proposed returning to Judea, at a time they thought dangerous, and they could not alter his purpose, they did not wish to be left behind; *Let us go*, says one of them to the rest, *that we may die with him*. It is true, when he was actually apprehended, the first shock of the

the trial was too strong, they forsook him and fled. He permitted this both to exempt them from danger, and to let them know that of themselves they could do nothing. But it seems they did not go far. When Thomas afterwards said, *Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe*; he spoke like one who had been an eye-witness to his sufferings, and expresses an earnestness, as if he still saw him wounded and bleeding. This catastrophe indeed almost disconcerted them; they had trusted it was he that should deliver Israel, but they saw him oppressed and slain by wicked men. From that time to his resurrection was a mournful interval, the darkest and most distressing period his church ever knew.

But the third day dispelled their grief: He returned victorious from the grave, proclaiming peace by the blood of the cross; he declared (and his appearance proved it) that the ransom was paid and accepted, and that having now overcome the sharpness of death, he had opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Then he spoke peace to their hearts, he opened their understandings to know the scriptures, and breathed upon them his Holy Spirit: He conversed frequently with them during forty days; gave them a large commission to preach his gospel, and an invaluable promise of his presence with them to the end of the world.

When he had thus confirmed them by those instructions and assurances, which his wisdom saw necessary, he was received up to heaven. They followed him with their hearts and eyes a-while, and then returned to Jerusalem rejoicing. They were not ashamed of their crucified Lord, or unwilling to bear the contemptuous names of Galileans or Nazarenes for his sake. They were not afraid, as if left like sheep without a shepherd in the midst of their enemies. They knew that though they could see him no more, his eye would be always upon them, and his ear open to their prayer: They waited according to his command for a farther supply of his spirit to qualify them for the important and difficult services which were before them. Nor did they wait long; a few days after his ascension, while they were praying with one heart and mind, the place where they were assembled was shaken as with a mighty wind: The spirit of power and wisdom was abundantly communicated to them; they spoke with new tongues, and immediately began to preach boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.

With this solemn and memorable event, I shall open the second book, and take up the thread of the Gospel History from that glorious day of Divine Power. The contents of this first book, namely, a brief view of the necessity and nature of the gospel dispensation, the causes why it is and has been opposed, and the circumstances of the first believers, I have pre-

premised as general principles for my own and the readers assistance in the progress of the work.

It is much to be wished that every reader might be impressed with the importance of our subject. It is not a point of curiosity, but of universal concern, and that in the highest and most interesting sense. Most of the researches and disquisitions which employ the time and talents of men, are of a trivial or indifferent nature: We may range on different sides concerning them; we may give or refuse or retract our assent when and as often as we please. We may be totally ignorant of them without loss, or be skilled in them all without deriving any solid comfort or advantage from them: But the gospel of Christ is not like the dry uninteresting theories of human wisdom; it will either wound or heal, be a favour of life or of death, a source of endless comfort or the occasion of aggravated condemnation to all that hear of it. To receive it, is to receive the earnest and assurance of eternal happiness; to reject it, or remain wilfully ignorant of its characters and properties, will leave the soul oppressed with guilt, and exposed to the wrath of God for ever. It highly concerns us therefore to enquire, Whether we believe the gospel or no; whether what we call the gospel is the same that Christ and his apostles taught, and whether it has had the same or similar effects upon our hearts. We live where the gospel is generally professed, and we are reputed Christians

tians from our cradles ; but the word of God cautions us to take heed lest we be deceived. We see Christianity divided into innumerable sects and parties, each supported by names, arguments, and books, and fighting for the credit of a denomination : But how many forget that in a little time all these divisions and subdivisions will be reduced to two ; the only real and proper distribution by which mankind (as to their religious character) ever was or will be distinguished, and according to which their final states will be speedily decided—*The children of God, and the children of the wicked one.*

B O O K II.

The Second Period of Christianity.

That I may neither incumber the Series of the History with too many Digressions, nor deprive myself of the Opportunity of making such Observations as the Subject will suggest conducive to our main Design; I propose in the first Chapter of this and the succeeding Book, to give a succinct View of the Progress and State of Christianity during each Period: And then by way of Appendix, to add one or more Chapters (as may be necessary) on such Particulars as are of more immediate Application to the Circumstances of our own Times.

CHAP. I. Of the Progress of the Gospel from our Lord's Ascension to the Close of the first Century. 2. Of the Life and Character of St. Paul considered as an Exemplar or Pattern of a Minister of Jesus Christ. 3. Of the irregularities and Offences which appeared in the Apostolic Churches. 4. Of the Heresies propagated by false teachers in the Apostles Days.

C H A P. I.

*Of the Progress of the Gospel from our Lord's
Ascension to the Close of the first Century.*

THE natural weakness of man is conspicuous in his most important undertakings : having no fund of sufficiency in himself, he is forced to collect all from without, and if the greatness of his preparations are not answerable to the extent of his designs, he has little hopes of success. Farther, when he has planned and provided to the utmost of his power, he is still subject to innumerable contingencies, which he can neither foresee nor prevent ; and has often the mortification to see his fairest prospects blasted, and the whole apparatus of his labour and care only contribute to make his disappointment more conspicuous and painful.

The reverse of this is the character of the wonder-working God. To his power every thing is easy ; he knows how to employ every creature and contingency as a means to accomplish his designs ; not a seeming difficulty can intervene but by his permission, and he only permits it to illustrate his own wisdom and
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agency, in making it subservient to his will. Thus having all hearts and events in his hands, he fulfils his own counsels with the utmost ease and certainty; and to shew that the work is his own, he often proceeds by such methods, as vain men account weak and insignificant; producing the most extensive and glorious consequences from small and inconsiderable beginnings. Thus the Lord of hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all human glory.

This observation might be confirmed by innumerable examples taken from the common history and experience of mankind; but the subject of our present undertaking exhibits the most illustrious proof. When the Jews had seen Jesus crucified, dead and buried, they expected to hear no more of him: His disciples were few, men of no authority, learning or influence; and since their Master, who had made them such large promises, was at last unable to save himself from death; it was probably expected that his followers would disperse of course; forsake their supposed delusions, and return to their fishing, and other employments suited to their capacities and talents.

They knew not that Jesus had arisen from the dead, and had frequently shewn himself to his servants to comfort and confirm their hearts. They little thought that he, whom they had seen expire on the cross, was immoveably seated at the right hand of God, possessed of all power in heaven and earth; but

but his disciples knew this, and therefore continued to assemble in his name. We do not find that there was much notice taken of them till the feast of Pentecost, which was about ten days after his ascension. At this season² by the Jewish law, the first fruits of the earth were presented at the temple. An appointment, typical of those more sublime first fruits of spiritual gifts and graces with which the Lord on this day enriched his disciples, (according to his promise) enabling them to preach his gospel and make his word effectual to the conversion of a large multitude; as an earnest of that divine power, by which he would support and extend his church and ministry to the end of the world.

When the hearts of God's people are united in love, and pleading his promises in the fervent exercise of faith and prayer, great things may be expected. Such was the happy state of the disciples on this solemn day: They were assembled with one accord; no jars or divisions had as yet taken place among them; they were animated with one desire, and praying with one mind; suddenly and wonderfully they obtained an answer: The place they were in was shaken as by a mighty wind³; their hearts were filled with the powerful energy of the Holy Spirit, and they were instantaneously

² TIBERIUS, A. D. 33.] In fixing the dates of our history, I shall conform to what I think the most probable and authorised opinion; without perplexing either myself or my readers with the niceties of critical chronology.

³ Acts chap. 2.

stantaneously enabled to speak languages which till then they were unacquainted with. These inward powers were accompanied with the visible symbols of fiery tongues, which sat upon each of their heads :—A fit emblem both of the new faculties they had received, and of the conquering, assimilating efficacy of the Spirit by whom they spoke, whose operations like the fire are vehement, penetrating, transforming and diffusive ; spreading from heart to heart, from place to place, till the flame, which was now confined within a few breasts, was communicated to many nations, people and languages.

The effects of this Divine Communication were immediately manifest ; they were filled with love, joy, and faith, and began boldly and publickly to praise God. Their emotion and zeal could not be long unnoticed : Those who first observed it, spoke of it to others, and a rumour was spread abroad. Jerusalem was at that time the occasional resort of the Jews and Jewish proselytes, who were dispersed throughout the known world, and multitudes had come from different countries to celebrate the feast. The promiscuous throng, who assembled upon the report, and had been accustomed to different languages, were therefore greatly astonished to hear of the wonderful works of God, every man in his own tongue. While some expressed their surprize at this, others ascribed it to the effects of wine, and shewed their scorn and despite
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to the spirit of grace, by reviling the apostles as drunkards. Thus they no sooner entered upon their public service, than they began to find the same treatment which their Lord had met with, and were for his sake the subjects of calumny and derision. This is a remarkable instance of the sagacity and temper which the men of the world discover in the judgment they form of a work of God: Nor is it probable, that our modern reasoners would have judged more favourably, if they could have been present at such a scene, where several persons were speaking loud at the same time, and each in a different language: since they account the operations of the same spirit, madness and folly, even where they are not attended with such extraordinary circumstances.

This weak and perverse slander was immediately refuted by the apostle Peter, who addressed the people in a grave and solemn discourse; and having in few words explained the nature of the fact, and shewn that it was an accomplishment of ancient prophecies, he proceeded to apply himself more closely to their consciences. He assured them that what they saw and heard was wrought by the power of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had rejected before Pilate. He informed them of that honour and glory which he now possessed, and charged them as accomplices in the murder of a person, whose character and dignity God had vindicated, by raising him from the dead.

dead. Though our Saviour had but few disciples during his personal ministry, he had doubtless left a deep impression of his words and works in the hearts of many. This discourse of Peter would naturally recal him to the remembrance of those who had seen him in the flesh, and lead them to reflect how earnestly and unjustly they had at the instigation of their priests compelled Pilate to put him to death. These reflections, the closeness of Peter's address, and the power of the Spirit of God, concurred to give them a deep conviction of their sin. They were pierced to the heart. They no longer wondered as curious spectators, but were solicitous for themselves, and cried out, Brethren, what shall we do? Peter then proceeded to open the treasure of Gospel-grace, and to direct them to Jesus whom they had crucified, for Salvation. The effect of this day's preaching (for though only Peter is named, it is probable there were more than one preacher or one discourse) was signally happy. Three thousand souls were converted, and, professing their faith and repentance, were by baptism publicly joined to the church.

A farther addition was soon after made : Peter and John ^b having recovered a man from incurable lameness, by faith in the name of Jesus, the report of the miracle brought a great concourse of people together a second time. Peter improved the occasion to preach to them at the temple-gate, to the purport of his former

^b Acts chap. 3.

mer discourse. He had an attentive auditory, and his word was made effectual to the conversion of many. But by this time the enemies of Jesus were greatly alarmed at the progress of his doctrine, and having ^c notice of what had passed, the priests and Sadducees violently apprehended Peter with John, and put them in prison. He had not finished his discourse, but he had said enough to be remembered; and this interruption, with the boldness of his following defence, made his words more regarded. The next day they were brought before the high priest, rulers and elders; and being asked concerning the late miracle, Peter, who once had trembled at the voice of a girl, was not afraid to use the utmost freedom and plainness with the council and heads of the Jewish nation. He confessed the name and cause of Jesus, reminded them of their wickedness in causing him to be crucified, and in direct answer to their question, assured them that the miracle was wrought in his name and by his power. Though the council were highly offended with this language, and the more so, as they observed the persons

^c Acts 4. 16, 17. Many consultations have been held and devices framed to stop the progress of the Gospel, as if it was a dangerous infection. But all such attempts are vain, they may as easily restrain the dawning of the day as suppress the spreading of the Gospel, when the Lord is pleased to raise up fit instruments to promote it, and to vouchsafe a season of refreshment from his presence. Then its influence cannot be restrained, a spark becomes a flame, a little one a multitude, and opposition only makes the effects more visible and noticed.

persons who spoke were private and unlettered men, yet being unable to deny the fact, (for the man who had been lame stood before them) and unwilling to incur the odium of punishing an action they were ashamed to disapprove, they dissembled their rage, and forbidding the apostles to speak any more to the people, they dismissed them: Yet they did not depart until they had protested against this inhibition, and declared their resolution to obey God rather than men.

The believers, tho' numerous, amounting to many thousands, lived in harmony and love, as children of one family. The greater part of them were poor; those therefore who had estates or money, willingly put their all into a common stock for the use of whole, which was entrusted to the care of the apostles. This is recorded as an instance of the benevolent and disinterested spirit with which the gospel inspired them, but is not enjoined as a precedent to be universally observed, since we have many proofs that the usual distinctions in civil life were retained in other churches planted by the apostles; and it soon gave occasion to discover, that in the best societies there may be found some unworthy intruders, and that very specious actions may be performed from base and dishonourable motives. Even under this richest dispensation of grace, there were some professors influenced by no higher motives than hypocrisy and vain glory. ^a Ananias, with his

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^a Acts chap. 5.

wife Sapphira, attempted to impose on the apostles by a concerted lye, and would have had the praise of giving their whole substance, when their avarice would only permit them to spare a part. As a warning to all pretenders who seek to join or serve the church from sordid and selfish views, Peter, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, denounced a severe sentence against this unhappy pair, and they both fell dead^e at his feet. The cause and suddenness of their death was a vindication of the apostles integrity and authority, and a seasonable admonition to others, to deter any from attempting to associate with the disciples who were not in heart devoted to the Lord.

The numbers of the believers still increased, and the report of the apostles doctrine and miracles extended from Jerusalem to the adjacent parts. The priests and sadducees therefore soon renewed their efforts to suppress them : they apprehended the apostles again, and put them in the common prison as malefactors ; but the Lord, to confirm the faith and courage of his people, and to shew how easily he can protect those who serve him, delivered them the same night by his angel. In the morning, when their enemies were met, and commanded them to be brought to their tribunal, they were surprized to hear that the prison doors were found secure, and the prisoners all escaped.

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...^e The apostolic censures were not like the papal anathemas, *bruta fulmina*, words without effect ; they were accomplished in an instant. See Acts xiii. 12.

They were, however, soon informed that they were not gone far, but were preaching boldly to the people (as the angel had directed them) regardless of their adversaries designs against them. They were alarmed at this notice, and began to be apprehensive of the event^f; yet, hurried on by their enmity to Jesus and his gospel, they once more sent their officers to take them, which they attempted in the mildest manner possible; for, as the prosecution was groundless and malicious, they were not without fear lest the multitude should interpose: but they had to do with the followers of Jesus, who would countenance no tumult in their own favour, and were neither afraid nor ashamed to confess his name in the face of danger. The apostles therefore peaceably yielded themselves, and being brought before the council, were severely questioned for disregarding the late prohibition they had received. Peter and the rest answered with their usual firmness; they avowed the fact, and their determination to persevere^g, and charged them as the betrayers and murderers of Jesus

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^f Acts 5. 24. It is not only a fruitless, but a very uneasy undertaking to fight against the truth and those who profess it. The boldest and wisest champions in this desperate cause are often brought to their wits end, and to foresee their own disappointment.

^g Peter and the apostles answered, We ought to obey God rather than men. It should seem that this (if any) may be called a natural maxim, and that the rudest savage, or the least child that can

in stronger terms than before. The majority of the council were exceedingly enraged at their boldness; they were cut to the heart, and consulted to put them to death. But the more moderate advice of *Gamaliel* prevailed. He shewed them, from some recent instances, that if this new sect was no more than an human institution, they need not give themselves trouble to suppress it, for it would soon sink and disappear of itself; but if it was indeed of God, their opposition would be not only in vain, but in effect a rebellion against God himself: he therefore recommended milder methods, and having considerable repute among them for his wisdom, the rest assented to him. In this manner the Lord, who has the hearts of all in his power, delivered the apostles a third time, by raising them an advocate from amongst their enemies. Yet, to save appearances, and that it might not be thought the council had proceeded so far without good cause, they were not dismissed till they had been scourged, and again enjoined silence. They departed rejoicing that they had the honour

can be made to understand the terms, must assent to the truth of the proposition, as readily as they perceive that *two and two* make four: how strange then is it, that men of the greatest parts and penetration, in other things, so seldom receive it! There are few periods to be found, even in the christian church, in which those who steadily acted upon this principle were not considered as heretics of the worst sort.

nour to suffer disgrace^b for the sake of Christ, and returned to encourage their companions; continuing still publicly, and from house to house, to teach and preach in the name of Jesus.

ⁱ These were happy times, when the whole company of the faithful were of one heart and mind, firmly united in affection, sentiment, ordinance and practice. Their adversaries, tho' angry and desirous to injure them, were powerfully restrained by the Divine Providence, so that they enjoyed peace in the midst of war, and were favoured with much grace in their hearts, and a daily increase in their numbers. Yet it was not long before an occasion arose which might have had unhappy effects, if the wisdom and authority of the apostles had not provided an early remedy. The church as yet consisted only of Jewish believers; but these were distinguished into Jews properly so called, that is, natives and inhabitants of Judea, and Hellenists or Grecians, the name given to those

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^b Here were faith and love in exercise: to suffer reproach for Christ was in their esteem an honour and privilege. It is mournful to observe how little of this spirit is to be found amongst us. How soon are we offended and troubled when our names are reproached, how uneasy to lie under contempt, how impatient to justify ourselves, and to be thought well of by all persons! Far from accounting it an honour to be made conformable to Jesus in this respect, we feel it a burden which we are restless to shake off: yet it must be borne, or we must give up profession and all; for neither are our characters more respectable than the first christians, nor is the world better reconciled to the things of God now than it was then. ⁱ Acts 6.

of the Jewish race and profession who had been dispersed and settled in the heathen countries. Many of these (as has been observed) were at that time in Jerusalem, and among the first converts to the gospel. As the multitude who were supplied out of the common stock was very great, it is no wonder if a few individuals were overlooked: some unavoidable instances of this sort gave rise to a complaint not only of negligence but partiality in the distribution of the money, and the Hellenists, or strangers, thought the others had an undue preference shewn them. The apostles, tho' upright and impartial, were unable to do every thing themselves, and therefore, to prevent such mistakes and suspicions, and that they might devote their whole time and attention to the more important services of the ministry, they entirely divested themselves of the pecuniary charge, and by their advice seven men were chosen, on whom, by prayer and imposition of hands, they solemnly devolved this trust. Thus the office of deacons was instituted: they were men full of wisdom and the Holy Ghost, and to them the care of the public money and the support of the poor was peculiarly confided. Some of them (perhaps all) were occasionally preachers, but this was no part of their office as deacons. By this expedient the cause of murmuring was taken away, and the peace of the church confirmed.

TIBERIUS, *A. D.* 34.] Thus the gospel flourished in defiance of opposition. The Jews,
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provoked more and more, began to lose all patience ; the mild counsels of Gamaliel could no longer restrain them, but their blinded passions hurried them to the last extremities. Stephen, one of the seven deacons newly elected, was the first who received the honour and crown of martyrdom : his zeal for the truth did not begin with his new office, tho' it is probable his undertaking that charge might place him more in view, and expose him more immediately to persecution. Promotions in the world are attended with worldly advantages ; but such promotions in the church as are agreeable to the spirit of God, will rather entitle a man to a larger share of labours and sufferings, and the painful pre-eminence of standing in the fore-front of the battle, to sustain the hottest brunt of every storm. Stephen was no sooner a public person than he became the mark of public opposition. At first they pretended to dispute with him, but when they were unable to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spake, they had recourse to more effectual methods to silence him ; they suborned false witness (a main instrument of persecution) against him, and having framed such an accusation as was most likely to alarm the prejudice and inflame the rage of the people, they brought him before the council, and charged him that he had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and against God. Stephen, tho' alone and unsupported in the midst of furious enemies, ap-

peared firm and unmoved as a rock in the midst of waves; he was not only devoid of fear, but filled with joy^{*}; the testimony of a good conscience, the honour of suffering for his Lord, and a sense of the love of God shed abroad in his heart, not only preserved his soul in peace, but spread a lustre and glory upon his countenance, so that all who sat in the council, looking upon him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. In such a disposition he thought it not worth while to attempt his own defence, but employed the whole time allotted him, in behalf of his adversaries, that if possible, by a distinct review of God's dealing with their nation, and their behaviour towards him, he might engage them to consider their ways, to repent and believe the gospel. While he spake of the things that had been long since transacted, and kept within the bounds of Moses, David and Solomon, they had patience to hear him; but when he began to make application to themselves with that warmth and plainness which the case required, they could bear no more; his words cut them to the heart; they no longer preserved the exterior gravity of their stations and characters, but gnashed at him with their teeth, as tho' they would have devoured him alive.

But vain are the attempts of men to intimidate those whom the Lord is pleased to comfort; he is always near to support his faithful servants,

^{*} Acts 7.

servants, and can manifest himself in a way which the world knows nothing of. Such a seasonable and sufficient discovery he made of himself to Stephen. As he looked stedfastly up to heaven, silently appealing from the injustice of his judges, he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing in glory at the right hand of God, as attending to all that passed, and ready to receive him to himself. Transported with this divine assurance, he was not at leisure to drop a single word to soften his incensed enemies: he endeavoured to communicate the glorious idea with which his soul was filled, and without regarding the sure consequences of such a declaration, he told them plainly what he saw. This determined their resolves. Hitherto they had been willing to preserve the form, at least, of a judicial process; but now, renouncing every restraint, and unmindful of their late acknowledgment to Pilate, that it was not lawful for them to put any man to death, they stopped their ears to shut out any remonstrance that might be offered, dragged him violently out of the city, and stoned him to death. His dying deportment, which shewed how eminently he was filled with the spirit of Jesus, whom he saw, is recorded as a fit pattern for the imitation of all who should be called to suffer for the truth in succeeding times; he kneeled down with the sweetest composure, and having committed his departing soul into his Redeemer's hands, his only remaining concern was for his murderers; and his last breath

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was a prayer that this sin might not be laid to their charge. Such resolution in the defence of truth, such calmness under sufferings, such tenderness and compassion towards those who oppose, are the surest marks of a high attainment in Christianity.

The death of Stephen, far from satiating the rage of the rulers¹, rather animated and excited them to new mischief; they observed no farther measures, but gave full vent to their cruelty, and raised a general persecution against the church. A young man named Saul, whom the Lord from before his birth had designed for a nobler service, was at this time one of their most zealous and active instruments; he had been a consenting spectator of Stephen's death, and kept the raiment of those that slew him. Encouraged by their example, he soon entered upon action himself, and made havock of the church, forcibly entering into their houses and dragging many to prison, both men and women: the disciples therefore, according to their Lord's direction^m, gave way to the storm, and dispersed themselves throughout Judea and Samaria, spreading the knowledge of the gospel wherever they went. Thus the methods taken to suppress the truth proved (as they often have since) the means of promoting its progress: yet the Lord, who appoints limits beyond which the fiercest attempts of men cannot pass, preserved the apostles in safety at Jerusalem, where he had farther occasion

¹ Acts 8.^m Matt. 10. 23.

caſion for their ſervice. Amongſt the many who left the city was Philip, another of the deacons : he preached Chriſt and his goſpel in Samaria, performed many cures and miracles among the people, and a great number received faith and were baptized. Here the goſpel triumphed over the illuſions of Simon ſirnamed Magus, or the Sorcerer, who by his vain arts and arrogant pretenſions had long held the people in ſubjection and aſtoniſhment ; but the ſuperior power of truth diſpelled the charm, his votaries forſook him, and even the impoſtor himſelf was ſo far convinced that Philip acted by that divine power and authority to which he had only pretended, that he profeſſed himſelf a believer likewise, and behaved ſo fairly that Philip admitted him to baptiſm without ſuſpicion ; but when, ſoon after, Peter ^a and John came to Samaria, to communicate the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt to the new diſciples by impoſition of hands, Simon diſcovered his true character, he offered money for a power to impart the ſame gifts ; a propoſal which ſhewed

^a Acts 8. 14. They ſent Peter and John. We find nothing in this book to countenance the pre-eminence which the papiffs aſcribe to Peter ; he and John were deputed by all the apoſtles, and went upon equal terms ; Peter did not ſend John, nor go himſelf, without the advice and direction of the reſt. John had once deſired to call for fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, but he was now better inſtructed, and gladly went to impart to them the beſt gifts he could beſtow. If the Lord is pleaſed to make any partakers of the ſame precious faith with ourſelves, tho' they were once enemies, we ſhould gladly forget all that is paſt, and receive them as dear brethren and intimate friends.

shewed his ignorance, wickedness and ambition in the strongest light, and proved him an entire stranger to the grace of God. From him the hateful practice of merchandizing in spiritual concerns has derived the name of Simony, a crime which, tho' condemned by the laws of every christian country, as highly injurious and ^o reproachful to the gospel of Christ, no laws or obligations have hitherto been able to suppress. Peter severely rebuked his hypocrisy, yet exhorted him to repentance and prayer. His words seemed to have some weight with Simon for the present, but we hear no more of him among the believers : on the contrary, he is recorded in history as an inveterate enemy to the faith and purity of the gospel, and the author of those wild, absurd and impure heresies which disturbed the first ages of the church.

About this time an eunuch, or great officer, of Candace queen of Ethiopia, who had been worshipping at Jerusalem (which makes it probable that he was a profelyte to the faith of the

^o In these abuses the church of Rome seems to derive rather from Simon Magus than from Simon Peter ; yet it is to be wished such practices were confined to the church of Rome only. Our laws have guarded against them by a very solemn and circumstantial oath ; but that this oath, if not literally broken, is often scandalously evaded, we need no other proof than the shameful advertisements which frequently appear in our public papers, not to say that tho' there is no money in the case, yet all presentations, exchanges and advancements that are transacted upon interested views, are so far simoniacal, in the sight of him who judges the heart.

the God of Israel) was returning homeward. Tho' this nobleman had been at Jerusalem, he had either not heard of the apostles and their new doctrines, or, being influenced by the priests and rulers, had not thought them worthy his notice. He was going home ignorant as he came, but the Lord, who is mindful of his people when they think not of him, appoints the time and the means of bringing them to the knowledge of the truth: and these are often seemingly precarious and contingent, that the work may more clearly be known to be his, and the praise ascribed to his power and providence. Philip, by the direction of an angel, intercepted the Ethiopian upon the road: he found him well employed, reading the prophet Isaiah as he sat in his chariot: he had a very confused idea of the passage he was reading, but he knew it contained an important meaning, and was desirous to discover it. Those who have a just sense of the excellence of the scripture, and peruse it, as he did, with a sincere intention to be instructed by it, may be encouraged from this instance to persevere, tho' they find it at present hard to be understood: he who gave them the desire, will, in due time, provide them a teacher, and make dark things plain to them. When Philip drew near, and asked him, without ceremony, if he understood what he read, he was not offended with the abruptness of his address, but courteously invited him to sit with him, confessing his ignorance, and the need he had of assistance.

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The passage which had perplexed him afforded Philip a fair opportunity of preaching Jesus : the eunuch believed, and was baptized in a water they were passing by. In this case there seems to have been no exertion of an outward miracle to confirm the word, nor was it necessary : the manner of Philip's meeting with him, the suitableness of the question to the dubious state of his mind, and the discovery he obtained, that the prophetic marks of the Messiah exactly coincided with the history of Jesus, afforded him sufficient evidence. The only extraordinary circumstance was the sudden disappearing of Philip, who, having performed his service, was removed by the power of the spirit to Azotus, a place thirty miles distant ; from whence proceeding along the sea-coast, he preached at Joppa, Lydia, and all the intermediate places till he came to Cesarea. In the mean time the eunuch, rejoicing in the Lord's goodness, pursued his journey to Ethiopia. We have no farther account of him in the New Testament, but some antient writers assure us, that he was the means of propagating the faith which he had received, first in his own country, and afterwards in places still more remote.

TIBERIUS, *A. D.* 35.] The church having suffered much from the violence of the persecution, the Lord was pleased to afford them intermission, and to give a remarkable ^p proof of the power of his grace, by the conversion
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of Saul, one of their fiercest opposers. He had been educated a pharisee, in a zealous attachment to the law, and from a mistaken principle of conscience, thought it his duty to suppress the followers of Jesus; the warmth of his temper prompted him to uncommon earnestness against them, and as he was a young man, he was probably farther instigated by a desire to ingratiate himself with the Jewish rulers. Not content with the mischief he had done at Jerusalem, he still breathed out threatenings and slaughter against them, and meditated their destruction even in distant places. With this view he obtained letters of authority from the chief priests, and set out for Damascus, that if he found any disciples there, he might bring them bound with him to Jerusalem. Little was he aware of the event of his journey! little did the believers imagine that the man, who now thirsted for their blood, would soon be their companion and leader! The Lord often permits those to whom he shews mercy, to run great previous lengths in their obstinacy and ignorance; their subsequent change is hereby more noticed, the riches of his grace are more remarkably exemplified for the encouragement of others, and such persons, from a lively sense of their past wickedness, and the undeserved favour they have received, are usually more strongly impressed with a sense of divine love, and more warmly devoted to his service. Some such there have been in every period of the church, and especially when-

whenever there has been a remarkable revival of the power of godliness. When Saul was drawing near to Damascus, perhaps within sight of the city, anticipating his bloody designs, and exulting in thought over the defenceless sheep of Christ, whom he had been taught to consider as schismatics and heretics, who deserved to be extirpated from the face of the earth; he was suddenly surrounded by a glorious light, exceeding the brightness of the mid-day sun, and heard a voice, not of uncertain application, but exhorting with him by name, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? If he was alarmed at the question, he was much more so, when, upon asking, Who art Thou, Lord? he was answered, I am Jesus the ^a Nazarene, whom thou persecutest. So nearly is the Lord interested in his people, and so dangerous is it to injure them: he accounts their cause, their sufferings, their enemies, his own. The Nazarene was an epithet of contempt affixed to the name of Jesus by those who hated ^r him, and it is probable that Saul had often spoke of him in these terms; but now he found himself in the Nazarene's power, and unable either to escape or to plead; he fell to the earth trembling and astonished beyond expression; he not only heard his voice but saw his ^s person, an interview which he could not have sustained a moment, if the
glory

^a This is the exact import of the Greek, *Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος*. Acts 22. 8. ^r And for this reason inserted in the title which Pilate put over his cross. ^s Acts 9. 27. 1 Cor. 15. 9.

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imposed

imposed upon others nor himself; but we have no account that any of them were converted, the most extraordinary occurrences being insufficient to change the heart, without the interposition of divine grace.

Thus the late persecuting Saul was numbered with the disciples, and soon distinguished himself amongst them: he now knew by experience the wickedness and danger of opposing the gospel, and was desirous to repair the mischief of his former rage and ill example. A sense of the mercy he had received, and compassion for the souls of others, made him seek every opportunity to persuade and convince the Jews, his former companions and brethren; but he soon found the same treatment from them, which he himself had often offered to the disciples: they opposed and vilified him as an apostate, and at length consulted to kill him: his former zeal in their cause was forgot, or, if remembered, it was an argument suited to inflame their resentment. But no counsel can prevail against those whom the Lord protects. Saul had timely notice of their designs, and because they watched the gates of the city incessantly, he was let down by a basket^t over the wall; for tho' he neither
distrusted

^t 2 Cor. 11. 33. *Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall.* The Lord often confounds the pride of his enemies by the manner in which he delivers his servants: he permits violent oppositions and great preparations to be made against them, and then disconcerts the combinations of the *many*, and the mighty, by feeble and unthought-of means.

distrusted his cause nor his protector, he was not unmindful to employ prudent means for his preservation. But before this he had made some excursions from Damascus, and visited Arabia; for his own words assure us, that it was not till the third year after his conversion that he returned to Jerusalem. In this interval the Lord, who had appeared to him in the way, by subsequent revelations, fully instructed him in the knowledge of his will, and qualified him for the apostolical office; so that he could afterwards say, that he received neither his authority nor his information from men. When he came to Jerusalem he would have joined himself to the disciples, but they, remembering his former conduct, and not clearly informed of the manner and reality of his change, were at first afraid of him. They had a right to be satisfied of his sincerity. But being soon afterwards introduced by Barnabas, he related to them the means of his conversion, and the occasion of his leaving Damascus. He continued for some time in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood, preaching and disputing in the name of the Lord Jesus. The Jews, who hated all the servants of Christ, could not but be particularly enraged at him, who had forsaken their party: against him therefore they chiefly set themselves, and making repeated attempts to kill him, he withdrew again from Judea, and went thro' Syria to Tarsus in Cilicia, his native place.

CALIGULA, *A.D.* 38.] ^u Upon his recess the churches in Judea, Samaria and Galilee had an interval of rest. The Jews, about this time, were taken up with their own affairs. Caligula, who had lately succeeded Tiberius in the empire, presumed to arrogate divine worship to himself, and commanded altars and temples to be erected to his honour: he was readily obeyed in many places, but when he required his statue to be put up in the temple at Jerusalem, the Jewish nation engaged as ^w one man to prevent it. They had rejected the holy one and the true, and the troubles were now beginning to take place, which ended at length in their total ruin and extirpation. Against this first affront and prophanation intended to their temple, they united in earnest supplications to Petronius, the governor of Syria, and with much entreaty obtained permission to send their deputies to the emperor, who was, tho' with great difficulty, prevailed on to desist from his purpose as to the temple; but at the same time he forbade them, under the severest penalties, to oppose the erection or dedication of temples

^u The churches had rest, and walked in the fear of the Lord, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and were edified and multiplied. Acts 9. 31. Some well-meaning persons seem to forget this passage, when they take it for granted, that the work of God cannot flourish, except there is a violent outward opposition against it. The world will dislike the gospel, but it is possible in some measure to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing; and the Lord can, and often does, favour his people with peace, and put their enemies under restraint. ^w Josephus de Bell. Jud. lib. 2.

temples to him, in any place without the city of Jerusalem. This injunction encouraged their enemies to affront their religion wherever they pleased, and laid a foundation for innumerable disturbances and dissensions, in which the Jews, whether aggressors or not, were always the greatest sufferers. While they were thus distracted among themselves, the believers enjoyed a favourable respite, and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, were edified and increased.

A. D. 39.] As Peter had formerly seconded the labours of Philip, the deacon at Samaria, he now visited those places where he had preached on his way to Cesarea, and strengthened the disciples he found there, by his doctrine and miracles. At Lydda* he restored a man to immediate health, who had been many years ill of a dropsy. Being afterwards invited to Joppa, he raised Tabitha or Dorcas to life, to the great joy of the poor and the widows

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whom

* Acts 9. 32. *He came to the saints at Lydda.* The Scripture does not use the word *saint* in the narrow and appropriate sense, of some, or with that improper extent which others have given to it in after times; it is neither peculiar to apostles and fathers, nor applicable to all who bear it in the Roman calendar, but it is the common appellation of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are saved from sin and condemnation by his grace. There have been saints in all ages, but real saints (while living) have usually been branded with opprobrious names. The world, which knows not Christ, cannot distinguish his people, but will rather give the title of saints to many who have hated and persecuted the gospel.

whom she had assisted by her alms and labours. While he made some stay here, his commission was enlarged, and he received direction from the Lord to communicate the gospel to the Gentiles, which had hitherto been restrained to the Jews, except in the case of the eunuch, for which Philip had been authorized by the express command of an angel.

When our Lord sent forth the apostles to preach, while he was yet upon earth, he expressly confined their mission to the house of Israel, and though, after his resurrection, he commanded them to disciple all nations, they did not immediately understand the extent of his meaning; tho' they were under an infallible guidance, they were not fully instructed at once, but received intimations of their duty from time to time, as circumstances varied, and as the designs of Divine Providence were successively opening. The great shepherd and head of the church has an appointed time and manner for the accomplishment of all his purposes; nothing can be effectually done, but when and where he pleases; but when his hour is come, then hard things become easy, and crooked things strait; his word, spirit and providence then will all concur to make the path of duty plain to those who serve him, tho' perhaps, till this knowledge is necessary, he permits them to remain ignorant of what he has designed them for. By this discipline they are taught to depend entirely upon him, and are afterwards more fully assured that he

has sent and succeeded them. Peter was not yet freed from the Jewish prejudice, that all intercourse with the heathens was unlawful; or if he had been so himself, he could not have easily convinced the many thousands of his brethren who laboured under the same mistake. This service was therefore pointed out to him by means which left no room for doubt in his own mind, and enabled him fully to vindicate his conduct to others.

⁊ Cornelius, a Roman centurion, or captain, with his family and dependents, were the first fruits of the Gentile converts. He lived at Cæsarea, a city not far from Joppa, and which was the ordinary residence of the Roman governors, and therefore promiscuously inhabited by Gentiles and Jews. It is not probable that he had never heard of Christ, or the new institution that was spreading under his name; but, without doubt, what he knew of it was only from public rumour, in which the misrepresentations of malice, and the surmizes of ignorance usually so far prevail, that persons of the best dispositions are often deterred from making those enquiries which the importance of truth deserves. But the Lord, whom he knew not, had been gradually preparing him for the reception of the gospel: he was already reclaimed from idolatry; he was a devout worshipper of God, exemplary in his family, just in his dealings, and charitable to the poor. How few of those now called christians can
equal

equal his character, while a stranger to the gospel, we may collect from daily observation. Yet those who plead for the sufficiency of what they stile natural religion, would do well to observe, that tho' he was in many respects a good man, and his sincerity was approved by God himself, yet he lacked one thing. But none who are made sincerely desirous to know the will of God, shall be left finally destitute; he will find a way to give them necessary information. Cornelius, who had often waited upon God by fasting and prayer, and had, doubtless, at times, felt that suspense and anxiety which can only be entirely removed by a clear knowledge of the gospel covenant, obtained at length an illustrious answer: an angel appeared to him, assured him that his prayer was heard, and directed him to send for Peter, who should inform him more fully of his duty.

It is observable that, tho' the angel was so minutely exact in his directions, as to mention the street and the very house where Peter resided, he said not a word of the gospel to Cornelius, but referred him wholly to Peter. The wisdom and goodness of God is pleased to make his people instrumental in teaching each other. This not only secures the honour of the success to him alone, but it conduces to their comfort and advantage. An angel could only speak historically, *that the thing is so*, but it comes nearer to our level when delivered by

by men who have been in the very case of others, and can say experimentally, *that they have found it so*. Who so fit to commend the physician's skill and tenderness, as those who have been themselves cured by him of a desperate disease? Peter had himself tasted that the Lord was gracious; he had greatly sinned, yet had been freely forgiven; he had seen his excellent glory upon the mount, and had received an express commission from his mouth. In these, and other respects, he was a proper person to proclaim him to others, more so than an angel from heaven. We may therefore safely infer, *a fortiori*, that no *man*, however great his talents may otherwise be, can be qualified or fit to preach the gospel, until he has known the evil of sin himself, and been a partaker of the pardoning grace of God thro' a crucified Redeemer.

Cornelius was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: his example and instructions had been a blessing to his household, so that he had servants about him to whom he could communicate this extraordinary event, and depend on their fidelity. Having related his vision to them, he sent them to Joppa, to invite Peter to his house.

When they departed from Cæsarea, Peter was under the influence of the national prejudice, which would hardly have permitted him to have gone with them; but while they were on the journey, the Lord prepared his mind
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to comply. The time was now^{*} come, when it was necessary he should know the extensive designs of God in favour of sinners of all nations, people and languages, and that the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles was broken down and taken away by the death of Christ. He received this intimation by a vision, which exactly corresponded in its circumstances with the case in hand. About noon the following day, when the messengers were near to Joppa, he was retired to the top of the house, for the convenient exercise of secret prayer, and having an appetite for food, he saw, as it were, a large sheet or wrapper let down from heaven, suspended by the four corners, containing all sorts of beasts, birds and reptiles, without any regard to the ceremonial distinction of clean and unclean : this appearance was accompanied with a voice directing him, To slay and eat. When he answered, That he had never yet transgressed the law, by eating unclean food ; the voice replied, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common or unclean. To impress the whole upon his mind, and to convince him that the vision was real and significant, it was repeated three

^{*} In the Lord's dispensations in favour of his people, there is often a counterpart resembling that which is related in this chapter. The minds of two or more persons are inclined, by different means, to concur in the same design, tho' perhaps they are far asunder, and know nothing of each other's intentions : in time, circumstances fall out which connect their views, and prove that the whole was from the Lord.

three times. When it was finally withdrawn, and while he was thinking^a what it might import, the men sent by Cornelius were enquiring for him at the door below, of which receiving previous notice by the secret suggestion of the spirit of God, and being directed to go with them without hesitation, he went down and spoke to them before they had time to send him word of their arrival by the people of the house. When he had heard their business, and compared the vision of Cornelius with his own, he scrupled no longer, but lodging the strangers that night, he accompanied them the next day, taking with him five of the brethren from Joppa, to be witnesses of what the Lord intended to do. Cornelius, who earnestly expected his arrival, had assembled his friends and dependants against his coming: he received Peter before them all with the greatest respect and cordiality, and gave him a particular account of what had past, professing that both he and his friends were ready to receive and obey his instructions. Peter now perceived and acknowledged the great truth the Lord had pointed out by so many harmonizing circumstances, That the blessings of the gospel were

^a Peter was faithful to the light he had already received, and did not hastily follow the first impulse upon his mind: tho' the liberty seemed to be authorized by a voice from heaven, he did not accept it without consideration. His example should be considered by those who give themselves up to the influence of every sudden impression, without taking time to consider its nature and tendency, and how far it is consistent with the revealed will of God.

were no longer to be confined to the Jews, but that Jesus was appointed to be a light to enlighten^b the Gentiles also. In his discourse to them he declared the person, character and offices of Jesus, who had been lately crucified, affirming himself to have been an eye-witness of what he related; he asserted his honour and authority as the Lord of all, the sovereign judge of the living and the dead; that he was the Divine Saviour spoken of by the prophets, and that all who believed in his name should receive the remission of sin. Here we see the apostle's doctrine to the Gentiles was the same that he had preached at Jerusalem upon and after

^b Acts 10. 34. Few passages of scripture seem to have been more misunderstood and misrepresented than this and the following verse; as some have presumed that St. Paul's doctrine of justification is corrected, if not confuted, by St. James. So the apostle Peter has been supposed to contradict both St. Paul and himself (see 1 Pet. 1. ver. 1, 2.) in another important truth of the gospel. This mistake is more excusable in those who do not understand the original; but those who do, ought not to avail themselves of an ambiguous word. The Greek προσωπῶς, from whence προσωποληψίας is derived, does not convey the same idea that an English reader receives from the word *person*; it does not properly signify a personal identity, but the outward appearance and circumstance of a person or thing. Thus it is sometimes rendered *face*, as Matt. 6. 16, and many other places, and is applied to the sky or air, Matt. 16. 3. *countenance*, Luke 9. 29. *presence*, 2 Cor. 10. 1. *fashion*, James 1. 11. The meaning here is the same as in Coloss. 3. 25. The Lord is not moved by the outward distinctions and differences amongst men, to which we often pay regard. (Compare 1 Sam. 16. 7.) He neither receives or rejects any for being Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, bond or free, male or female, but is rich in mercy to all who call upon him.

after the day of Pentecost, and the same with what our Lord had declared concerning himself; *a free and compleat salvation by faith*. He did not in the least attempt to accommodate his subject to any supposed prejudices of his new hearers, but faithfully acquitted himself of his message, and left the event to God. The mystery of Christ crucified, which was a stumbling block to the Jews, was by many of the Gentiles accounted foolishness and absurdity, but the apostles proposed it simply and indifferently to all. In the present case, the success was (what has perhaps seldom happened) universal; the whole company believed, and received the Holy Ghost immediately, previous to baptism, and without the usual imposition of the apostle's hands. This signal attestation with which the Lord honoured their faith, unanswerably removing every doubt concerning their fitness, Peter immediately directed them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, thro' whom they had already received that inward and spiritual grace, of which baptism was the outward and visible sign.

When this affair was reported in Judea, it was not at first agreeable to those who knew not the warrant and grounds on which Peter had proceeded; so that, when he returned to Jerusalem, he found himself under a necessity of vindicating^c his conduct to the Jewish converts: a full proof that they did not think him infallible,

^c Acts 11.

infallible, or possessed of that superiority over the whole church, which designing men, for promoting their own ends, have since ascribed to him. But tho' he was an apostle, and had acted by the express command of God, and tho' their expostulation seems to have been hasty and rough, yet he did not think it beneath him to give an orderly and circumstantial account of the whole business: they, on the other hand, were open to conviction, and, when they had heard his relation, they instantly acquiesced, and glorified God for his grace given to the Gentiles. This mutual condescension and ingenuoufness preserved the first christians in peace, tho' they were not always exempted from mistakes and wrong impressions.

By this time the believers, who had been dispersed by persecution, had spread the gospel beyond the bounds of Judea and Galilee into Cyprus and Syria, and probably to more distant parts, particularly to Rome, which being the centre and conflux of the empire, would hardly be long unvisited; however, in all places the preaching of the word was confined to the Jews, till Peter's mission to Cornelius afforded an authorized precedent for imparting it to the heathens.

A. D. 40.] It was soon after publicly preached in Antioch, the capital of Syria, and no less eminent for luxury and depravity of manners; yet amongst these dissolute and enslaved people, the gospel of Christ, accom-

accompanied with a divine power, was suddenly and remarkably prevalent to turn a great multitude from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. The means of this happy change are expressly mentioned: What the Philosophers had long attempted in vain, by cold encomiums on the beauty of virtue, was speedily effected by those who simply preached the Lord Jesus, as the author, finisher and fountain of salvation. When the news of this good beginning was brought to Jerusalem, the apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch, who, being a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost himself, was greatly rejoiced when he saw the numbers and sincerity of the converts, and animated them, by his exhortations, to cleave to the Lord with steady resolution; for he was sensible of what they, perhaps, were little aware of as yet, how many arts the enemy of souls employs to discourage those who are beginning to walk in Wisdom's ways. He afterwards went to Saul, and prevailed on him to leave Tarsus, and join with him in the service of the gospel at Antioch. By the Lord's blessing on the endeavours of these faithful labourers, the church was so greatly encreased, that the believers there first received the general denomination of Christians: a significant and instructive appellation, strongly importing their duty and relation to Christ, and to each other, and has therefore universally obtained, and will probably subsist to the end of time. But tho' this name is accounted honourable with us, and has always been

been deemed, by those who truly deserve it, the noblest title, *the highest style* of man, it had not the same general estimation when first imposed; in the mouth of unbelievers, whether Jews or Heathens, it was a term of infamy and reproach, and expressive of the highest contempt^d, and may be therefore ranked among the many opprobrious epithets by which the Lord's faithful followers have been marked out to the rage and scorn of the world.

Caligula, having rendered himself universally odious by his inhumanity and caprice, was assassinated in his palace, in the fourth year of his reign^e.

CLAUDIUS, *A. D. 41.*] He was succeeded by Claudius, who, soon after his entrance on the government, bestowed the kingdom of Judea on Herod Agrippa, a grandson of Herod stiled the Great (mentioned Matt. 2.) and nephew to Herod the Tetrarch, who put John the Baptist to death. This prince experienced much of that vicissitude which usually attends ambition; he had been detained in prison and chains by Tiberius, greatly favoured and advanced by Caligula, and now seemed to have attained the summit of his wishes; but employing his power to persecute the church, he was suddenly cut off in

^d — quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat: auctor nominis ejus Christus, qui Tiberio imperante, per procuratorem Ponticum Pilatum suppliciis affectus erat.

Tacitus, ann. 15.

• Josephus's Ant. lib. 10.

n the height of his prosperity : For who can harden^f himself against the Lord and prosper ! Herod was a professed zealot for the law of Moses and the Jewish institutions, and studied by every means to ingratiate himself with the people. He first expended vast sums in the defence and ornament of the city ; but it was in his power to attempt a still more acceptable service, by exerting his authority against the people of Christ : and the motives of vanity and popularity, by which he was governed, prompted him to embrace the occasion. He began by apprehending the apostle James, the son of Zebedee, whom he hastily put to death ; and finding that the Jews were highly pleased with this step, he proceeded to imprison Peter, intending to delay his execution till after the passover, [A. D. 44.] that his zeal against these innovators might be applauded by a greater number of spectators. This stroke, tho' very afflictive to the church, was wisely permitted, to illustrate the courage and fidelity of the apostles : it shewed that their miraculous powers and high office afforded them no sure exemption from persecution, but that they ventured and acted upon the same principles of faith and love to Jesus, in common with other believers. Thus James finished his course, and received the crown the first of the apostles. But Peter, being designed for farther services, was still safe, though, to an eye of sense, he seemed marked out for a speedy sacrifice : in-

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cessant

^f Acts 12.

cessant prayer was made on his behalf by the disciples ; and the united prayers of God's people have an efficacy which can be withstood by no human power : when he inclines them to join with earnestness and perseverance in prayer, it is because he has already determined to grant their petition. In this case the answer was signal, tho' not immediate. The night before Peter was to have been brought forth to suffer, he was sleeping between his keepers with that serenity which is peculiar to those who have a good cause, a good conscience, and a steady faith in God : neither the inconveniences of a prison, nor the expectation of death, could discompose him, for he knew in whom he had believed ; but he was awakened by an angel, who freed him from his chains, opened the prison-doors, and brought him into the street unperceived by the guards. After the angel had thus set him at liberty, and was departed, Peter went to the house where his friends were at that instant praying for his deliverance. Thus they had a remarkable proof that the Lord is indeed a God that heareth prayer ; and it is recorded for our encouragement.

In the morning, Herod found himself disappointed of his prey. The guards, upon examination^s, being unable to give an account of their prisoner, he commanded them to be put to

^s Herod examined them himself. It is probable he found strong reason to think Peter had been miraculously delivered,

to death. It is probable that Herod, or his advisers, might suspect a miraculous interposition (as the apostles had been delivered the same way a few years before;) but to punish the keepers, as if they had been guilty of conniving at his escape, was the most likely method to stop farther enquiry, and prevent the people from supposing any thing extraordinary in the affair.

Herod did not long survive this event. He lived and died a monument of the instability of human greatness. He was much devoted to his Roman masters, and had a taste for their magnificence. This induced him to celebrate games and shews at *Cæsarea*, in honour of the emperor: here he laboured to display the utmost of his grandeur. His pride was farther flattered by the arrival of an embassy from Tyre and Sidon. These cities had incurred his displeasure, but, as they chiefly drew their subsistence from his dominions, they were compelled to supplicate peace, which, though they had highly offended him, they obtained by their interest with Blastus his chamberlain. The king appointed a day to receive their submission, when he appeared with a splendor that dazzled the eyes of the spectators: he addressed himself to the ambassadors in a pompous oration, suited, we may suppose, to give

K 2

them

vered, but, like a *wise* politician, he dissembled his conviction, and, to stifle all suspicion, wreaked his resentment upon the soldiers. They, without doubt, believed there was something extraordinary in the case, and might have said so, if they had lived—but dead men tell no tales.

them the highest idea both of his power and his clemency. When he had ended, he heard his praises resound from every quarter: the multitude shouted, It is the voice of a god, not of a man. His vain heart was elated with this impious compliment, which indeed was no more than had often been used upon such occasions among the heathens; but when it was now adopted by those who professed a knowledge of the true God, the proud worm, who durst be pleased with it, was made a sudden and awful example of the divine displeasure: the avenging angel of the Lord smote him with an irresistible, tho' invisible stroke, and, while surrounded with the fancied insignia of majesty, and in the midst of their idolatrous acclamations, he found and confessed himself a mortal. He was seized with excruciating pains, and expired in a few days, being in a manner devoured by vermin bred from his bowels. With his death the persecution ceased. He perished, and was quickly forgot; but the word of God, which he had attempted to suppress, grew and multiplied as before.

The church of Antioch, during this time, greatly encreased, and enjoyed the benefit of many excellent teachers, some of whom were endued with a prophetic spirit, by which the Lord intimated his will to them in particular cases. In this way they had been informed of an approaching dearth, and, as seasons of scarcity would severely affect the disciples in Judea, who laboured under peculiar difficulties, they

cheerfully contributed to their relief, and sent the collection to Jerusalem by Saul and Barnabas, who, having fulfilled their commission, returned to Antioch about this time^h. [*A.D.* 45.]

These two were soon afterwards appointed, by an express revelation, to propagate the knowledge of the gospel in other countries: they were set apart to this service by the solemn prayers of the church, and attended by John, surnamed Mark, who had accompanied them from Jerusalem. Thus they went forth, like Abraham, uncertain whither they were to go, but assured of an infallible guidance and power to direct and prepare the way.

It is generally believed that, nearly about the same time, the apostles at Jerusalem likewise separated to preach the gospel, in the districts respectively allotted them by the direction of the Holy Spirit; and we have some account from antiquity of their several provinces, according to which, they divided among them the greatest part of the known world, from India to Barbary, and from Abyssinia to Scythia. Indeed there is no doubt but they executed their commission as apostles, and spread the gospel far and wide; but the particulars recorded of their labours, sufferings and circuits, are not transmitted with such authenticity and clearness, as to give entire satisfaction. The only *certain* history we have of the apostolic age is that of Luke, which we

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call

^h Acts 13.

call the Acts of the Apostles, and this, from the period we are now come to, is confined to those events in which Paul was personally concerned, and does not even carry on his history to the end of his life. The wisdom of God having given us, both in the life of Jesus, and of his first servants, rather a specimen sufficient for our instruction, than a compleat history to gratify our curiosity, to this plan we shall conform, and, while we have the light of an inspired writer, we shall not wander after the glimmerings of tradition. I shall therefore, in the progress of this chapter, confine myself to the Evangelist's narration, so far as it goes; and, when he leaves us, it will be sufficient to comprize, in a very narrow compass, the most certain, or most probable incidents, which we can recover to complete the records of the first century.

Saul and Barnabas embarked at Seleucia, a sea-port in the neighbourhood of Antioch, and sailed to Cyprus: they landed at Salamis, on the east side, and proceeded thro' the island to Paphos, in the west, making the first tender of the gospel in every place to the Jews. At Paphos, the Roman governor, Sergius Paulus, was desirous to hear the apostles doctrine: he was attended by Elymas, a pretended magician and prophet, who, fearing the discovery of his impostures, laboured to divert the governor from his purpose, and to prejudice him against them. But Saul sharply rebuked his wickedness,
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and, by the ¹ impulse of the Holy Spirit, denounced a sentence against him, suitable to his crime: he who endeavoured to detain others in darkness and ignorance, was suddenly struck blind himself. This punishment, which he could neither foresee nor avoid, discovered the vanity of his claims, and convinced the governor that the preachers spoke by an authority superior to their own; he therefore attended more carefully to their words, and became soon a partaker of their faith.

From Cyprus they sailed to Perga, in Pamphilia, where their attendant Mark, either already wearied with fatigue, or apprehensive of greater difficulties, or from a fickleness and levity of temper, would proceed no farther with them, but returned to Jerusalem. By this indiscretion he not only lost many valuable opportunities, which he afterwards regretted, but in the end gave occasion to a great difference between Barnabas and Paul. Such is the state of humanity, that those persons in a society who cannot do much good, are often, by their imprudence, the cause of much harm, even

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where

¹ It is expressly said, Saul, or Paul, was filled with the Holy Ghost; therefore the severe expressions in his reprimand were not the effects of intemperate anger, but a solemn declaration of the Sorcerer's true character: yet it is safer to imitate the apostle in his patience and humility, than in this singular instance. The power of God, which accompanied his words, proved by what impulse and authority he spoke. We, who are not apostles, and who make no claim to apostolic power, shall act more in character, to conform to the general rule St. Paul has given us, 2 Tim. 2. 24, 25.

where they intend otherwise. From Perga they proceeded to Antioch in Pisidia, and entered into the synagogue. [*A. D.* 46.]. Their habit and manners bespoke them Jews, but perhaps the rulers of the synagogue were not apprized of their character. When the ordinary service was finished, they were desired to propound their sentiments. Paul, who was usually the speaker, addressed them in a long discourse, a valuable abstract of which is preserved to us. In his introduction, he reminded them of their antient history and prophecies, but the sum and substance of his sermon was Jesus: He proved from the scripture, that *He* was the Messiah, in whom the promises centered, and proposed him to all as the great object of faith, thro' whom, and by whom alone, forgiveness of sin was to be obtained, and a free justification from those offences for which the law of Moses had made no provision. In the close, he solemnly warned them of the danger of rejecting this Saviour and his gospel. His discourse made no great impression upon the Jews, but some of the heathens, who had been occasionally present, desired to hear the matter farther explained; accordingly, on the next Sabbath, almost the whole city was collected to hear the gospel, which exceedingly offended the Jews, and prompted them to interpose with cavil and abuse. The apostles then told them in plain terms, that, tho' their message was first to them, yet, since they refused to receive it, they would henceforth
freely

freely proclaim it to the heathens, from whom they expected a more favourable hearing : nor were they disappointed in their hope, for many of the latter received the word with joy, both in the city and adjacent country^k. The Jews, farther exasperated by this success, so wrought upon the passions and prejudices of some persons of influence, both men and women, who were probably proselytes, and superstitiously devoted to their new profession, that Paul and Barnabas were violently compelled to depart ; but they left behind them disciples, the fruits of their ministry, who were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, and thereby enabled to maintain the faith, tho' their teachers were forced from them.

The apostles, shaking off the dust of their feet (as our Lord had commanded) for a testimony against the obstinate infidelity of the Jews, went from thence to Iconium, the chief city of Lycaonia, where they made many converts, both Jews and Gentiles. But the Jews who believed not, actuated by the same spirit in every place, opposed them^l earnestly ; yet they staid so long, and met with such success, that

* When the Jews saw the *multitudes* they were filled with envy. Among the clamours raised against persons and doctrines in our own time, some have not been ashamed to alledge the great concourse of people usually attending, as a sufficient objection, forgetting (as it should seem) that this was one circumstance that provoked and instigated the enemies of christianity from the beginning. John 7. 40, 48. and 11. 48. and 12. 19. ^l Acts, ch. 14. *The Jews stirred up the people, verse 2.* There is a natural enmity in the hearts.

that the city was divided ; a part holding with them, and a part influenced by their enemies, who from thence took occasion to represent them to the magistrates as disturbers of the public peace : a charge which has often been falsely urged against the ministers of the gospel. At length their adversaries prevailed, and violent measures were resolved on ; but they, having notice of it, withdrew in time to Lystra, in the same province, where they pursued their ministry with their usual zeal and firmness, without being deterred by the opposition they had already met with, or were likely to meet in every place. Among their hearers at Lystra, there was one who had been a cripple from his birth : Paul, observing his attention, and some indications of faith in his behaviour, was directed to confirm the doctrine of Jesus by a signal miracle. He commanded the lame man to stand upright upon his feet, and his word was accompanied with immediate power ; the man, who had never walked, instantly sprang up, and possessed the perfect use of his limbs. It appeared from this instance, that tho' miracles have a tendency to rouse the attention, and are a proof of a power beyond the ordinary course of things, yet they cannot, of themselves, inform or

hearts of some men, but in many it is dormant ; they are engaged in business and pleasure, and would be content to let the people of God alone, as unworthy their notice : these must be *stirred up* by the more zealous, to join in the common cause ; and accordingly no pains or misrepresentations are spared to rouse them from their indolence.

or convince the mind of truth ; for the ignorant multitude, tho' greatly struck with what they saw, were so far from believing the apostle's doctrine, on the evidence of this miracle, that they endeavoured to account for it on their own idolatrous principles : they forgot all they had heard of Jesus, and cried out, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. Agreeable to their blinded notions, they called Barnabas, Jupiter ; and Paul, Mercury : imagining something in them peculiarly characteristic of those fabulous deities. In the warmth of their superstition, they assembled with their high-priest^m and victims, and would have offered sacrifices to the men who came to turn them from dumb idols to serve the living God. But nothing gives the faithful ministers of Christ greater pain, than to have any part of that honour or dependence addressed to themselves, which they are desirous wholly to engage for their Lord and Master. Paul and Barnabas, who had suffered persecution and ill treatment with patience, were transported beyond their usual bounds at these marks of ignorant applause ; they rushed in among the people, confessed their own infirmities, boldly
reproved

^m The high-priest was probably willing to avail himself of the superstition of the people, and thought it a favourable occasion to establish the belief of a peculiar sanctity and virtue in the temple at Lystra, which might increase the number of votaries, and promote his own wealth and influence ; just as a legendary report of the appearance or miracles of some saint, or angel, has been improved to procure a veneration for particular cities, or temples, in christian countries,

reproved their blind idolatry, and directed them where alone their thanks and worship were due ; yet, with all they could say, they hardly prevailed on them to desist. It was happy for them that they sought not their own glory, and could not be elated with the applause of men. Poor and precarious is the reward of those who aim no higher than this ; for, as the tide, after running violently one way, soon and suddenly reverts to the contrary extream, so inconstant is the praise and regard of the unthinking many, who are governed by appearances, and susceptible of every new impression. Some of the restless Jews followed the apostles from Iconium, and, by their insinuations, prevailed on the same people to treat those as malefactors, whom a little before they had revered as deities : they tumultuously assaulted Paul (who, being the chief speaker, was usually the chief sufferer) stoned him, and dragged him out of the city, supposing they had killed him : but the Lord, to whom the issues of life and death belong, restored him, and healed his bruises, so that he rose up while the disciples were sorrowfully standing round him, and having entered into the city, to shew that he was neither dead nor intimidated, he was enabled to accompany Barnabas the next day to Derbe.

Here they continued some time, and taught many, and this was the boundary of their present progress. From hence they returned (regardless of their enemies) to the places they
had

had been at before, to Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and Perga, confirming the believers, forming them into societies, and constituting elders and pastors, from amongst themselves, in every church. In all places they took care to instruct the believers in the nature of their profession, and reminded them of an unalterable necessity in the present constitution of things, That thro' much tribulation ^a we must enter into the kingdom of God. After this, recommending the new converts to the grace and care of the Lord, in whom they had believed, they again took shipping, and returned to Antioch in Syria. Upon their arrival they assembled the whole church, and gave them a particular account of all that the Lord had done
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^a Acts 14. 22. That this was the case in the primitive times, is generally allowed; but we have been told by some, that things are now greatly altered in this respect: they would persuade us that our Lord's words (Matt. 7. 13.) are no longer in force; that the way to the kingdom, in our happy days, is broad, spacious, smooth, and thronged by multitudes (the very characters he has given us of the road to destruction.) Such teachers and writers are little aware how they proclaim their own ignorance. If they knew the spirit of enmity which the world bears to true christianity—the trials with which the Lord visits his people, to prove and exercise their faith—the assaults and temptations they endure from the powers of darkness—the griefs they feel from a sense of their own unfaithfulness and unfruitfulness—the fightings without, and fears within, which are more or less experienced in the christian life—If they knew these things, they would speak otherwise. The beaten way to honours and preferments is, perhaps, free from these tribulations; but not so the way that will lead to the kingdom of God.

for them, and *by* them, in their late circuit. [A. D. 47.] This is the news which believers delight to relate and hear ; the traverses of policy, or the events of war (the usual topics of conversation,) afford them but little' entertainment, but it rejoices their hearts to be informed of new accessions to the Redeemer's kingdom, and to see how his wisdom and grace triumph over all opposition.

Hitherto the church had only to struggle with outward difficulties ; but, as human nature is always the same, and the apostolical times were to transmit instruction to the people of God in every succeeding period, mistakes, disputes and divisions were, by degrees, permitted to take place among professed believers. If it had not been so, we might not only have been discouraged by the great disparity between the first christians, and those who have lived since, but, for want of rules and precedents of sufficient authority, we should have been continually at a loss how to oppose and confute the various errors which have appeared and been revived during so many centuries : the Divine Wisdom therefore thought fit to suffer every false and dangerous notion, whereby the enemy of souls would at any time attempt to corrupt the simplicity of the faith, to make its first entrance while the apostles were yet living, that we might have their instructions and examples to guide us in every emergency. However paradoxical it may seem, we hope in a proper place to shew, that no new opinion, either
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right or wrong, respecting the faith in Christ, has been started since the close of the scriptural *Canon*. As the gospel, that good and perfect gift, came down from the Father of Light *compleat*, and has received no amendment from the hands thro' which it has successively past, —so, on the other hand, the Grand Deceiver exerted *all* his force against it, and availed himself of *all* his influence on the ignorance and wickedness of men from the very beginning, and has no subtile devices in reserve now, having tried his utmost resources over and over. It is true, length of time, and change of circumstances, have afforded him opportunities of placing his delusions in various lights, and have given some of his schemes a seeming strength and establishment which they had not at first ; but, as a man attained to his full stature and vigour, is the same individual person that was once an infant unable to stand alone, so there neither is, nor has been, any erroneous principle, however authorized or recommended, or perhaps applauded as a new discovery, by those who are ignorant of scripture and antiquity, but we can, from express passages in the apostles writings, shew that the same existed in their time, tho' in a more feeble and infantile state. This point we are to illustrate more at large hereafter ; at present I am only concerned to take notice of a dissention that arose among the believers at Antioch, not long after the return of Saul and Barnabas, which made their presence there particularly useful :
this

this was occasioned by some Judaizing professors who came down from Judea, and taught the Gentile converts, that, except they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved. This dangerous position, arising from a misapprehension of the righteousness of Christ, as the only ground of a sinner's acceptance with God, and tending to substitute a quicksand for the foundation of hope, instead of the immoveable rock which God has laid in Zion, was warmly opposed by these apostles of the Gentiles; they had a double conviction of its falsehood, both from the nature of the faith they had received themselves, and the effects of the gospel they had imparted to others; but many weaker minds, having less experience of the work of grace in their own hearts, and less acquaintance with what the Lord had wrought in others, were staggered. When, therefore, after many debates, the point was not settled to satisfaction, it was resolved to depute Paul and Barnabas to consult the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. [*A D. 49.*] If this (as seems probable) was the journey St. Paul refers to, *Gal. 2.* they were directed to take this step by the Spirit of God, since he there says that he went up to Jerusalem by, or in consequence of, a revelation: they were accompanied by some brethren, and in every place where they found believers, they comforted them with the account of their late progress. At Jerusalem they were cordially received, and having declared the happy fruits
of

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Jew

Jew and Gentile, purifying their hearts by faith in his blood, and imparting to them those substantial blessings, of which the ceremonial law exhibited no more than the shadow, and which, in comparison of the liberty of the gospel, he termed an unnecessary yoke too heavy to be borne. The assembly then kept silence, while Paul and Barnabas related more at large the fruits of their late mission among the heathens. The conference was closed, and the determination given, not by Peter, but by James, who asserted the Gentiles freedom from the Jewish yoke, and enjoined them only to abstain from fornication, from things offered to idols, and from blood. The two latter points were necessary to preserve a friendly intercourse between the Gentile and Jewish converts, so long as these were indulged in observing the Levitical institutions; and the prohibition from fornication, tho' immediately belonging to the moral law, which was of universal obligation, was added to give the Gentiles a deeper sense of the guilt and evil of a practice, which the most civilized and virtuous heathens considered as almost, if not wholly innocent.

This sentence was generally embraced, and a letter to the same effect was written to the believers at Antioch, confirming them in their christian liberty. In this they thought it a sufficient condemnation of the opposite opinion to say, They had given no such commandment: a protestation the apostles might have often repeated, had they lived to this day; but

but since their genuine writings still subsist, we may, by parity of reason, still infer, that we need not be afraid of rejecting any thing that is enjoined as binding upon the conscience, if we can be sure that the apostles, who were divinely inspired to explain the christian faith and practice, have given us no precept in its favour. They likewise took care to assert their firm persuasion, that their decision was agreeable to the dictates of the Holy Spirit. This convocation has generally been stiled, The *first* Christian Council; but indeed, when we compare it with those which bore the same name afterwards, and were professedly formed upon this precedent, we shall be almost tempted to say, It was not only the *First*, but the *Last*. Here were no intrigues practised, no temporal interests consulted, no fierce and bloody anathemas issued to give a sanction to persecution, no uncertainty or animosity in the issue, but the affair was conducted with freedom and moderation, and the conclusion made by general consent, and to the satisfaction of both parties: how different, in these respects, from the spirit of after times! But tho' this answered the end in the present case, the judgment of the apostles was not entirely obeyed, even while they lived. This debate was revived in other places, and proved a frequent impediment to the peace of the church, so long at least as the temple and worship of Jerusalem continued, and gave St. Paul occasion to write his epistle to the Galatians expressly on this subject; nay,

it seems the mistake still subsisted in Judea, tho' none publicly ventured to contradict the decree when it was made; for when, some time after, Peter went to Antioch, and conversed^o freely with the Gentile converts, living after their manner for a season, yet, when some brethren came down from Jerusalem, he was so fearful to offend them in this matter, that he separated himself again, and, by his influence, prevailed on Barnabas likewise to dissemble in favour of those of the circumcision. For this weak compliance, whereby he seemed to overthrow what he had before established, St. Paul withstood him to his face: he did not detract from his character by insinuations to his prejudice behind his back, nor did he content himself with reproving him in secret, but, as the offence was public, tending to confirm the Jews in their bigotry, and to offend the weak on both sides, he boldly and publicly rebuked him before them all. Strange weakness incident to the best of men, that Peter, who had first laid aside his prejudices, who had visited the Gentiles by divine direction, had seen the happy effects of his compliance, and vindicated his own conduct so unanswerably upon a late occasion, should now shrink and trifle, expose himself and grieve his brethren, thro' fear of those who came from Jerusalem! To be delivered from the fear of man, is a deliverance indeed! It was happy for Peter that he had, in his brother Paul, a faithful

faithful friend; who, by a few well-timed words, broke the chain and set him at liberty. It is surprizing that any who have read this passage should dream of fixing on Peter, above any other of the apostles, to be the supreme and infallible head of the christian church.

Justus and Silas, two of the brethren, were sent with Barnabas and Paul to accompany the letter, and to declare the purport of it more at large. They were gladly received at Antioch, and not only confirmed the peace of the church, but were farther helpful to their faith, by the singular gifts with which the Lord had honoured them. In a little time Justus returned to Jerusalem, but Silas chose to continue longer, and was afterwards the constant companion of St. Paul in his travels.

A. D. 50.] This obstacle being removed, the gospel flourished greatly at Antioch. But, amidst all their services and success there, Paul and Barnabas could not forget the converts they had left in Cyprus and Asia Minor; they proposed therefore to make them a second visit, to comfort them, and to see how the work had prospered in their absence: but a difficulty was started concerning *John*, surnamed *Mark*, who had formerly left them at Perga, and having probably repented of his irresolution, was now desirous to proceed with them again. Paul warmly opposed this, thinking him highly culpable for his inconstancy, and perhaps too much influenced against him by a spirit of resentment not wholly excusable. On the other

hand, Barnabas undertook his apology, in which, besides his tenderness to his fault, he seems to have been moved by considerations which ought to have no place where the service of God is concerned. John was his sister's son, and this led him to consider his conduct in the most favourable light. Thus they were both a little partial in the cause, but much more wrong in the issue; for the contention became so sharp between them, that it broke their harmony. They determined to part; accordingly Barnabas took Mark (whose company he had dearly purchased by the loss of Paul's) and sailed to Cyprus, his native place; and Paul, choosing Silas in his room, went thro' Syria and Cilicia, being recommended to the Lord by the prayers of the brethren. So that their former work was now divided between them.

I must venture to digress here a little for the sake of two remarks, of which the course of our history may often remind the reader.

1. How small an occasion will discover human infirmity even in the brightest characters! Not all the graces of Paul and Barnabas, nor the remembrance of the services and difficulties they had jointly experienced, nor the importance of the common cause in which they were engaged, nor the fear of giving offence to the world and to the church, could restrain these dear friends, fellow labourers and fellow sufferers, from contending and separating about a trifle.
2. How wise is the over-ruling providence

vidence of God, permitting such things for the trial of some, the instruction of others, and the better carrying on his own designs ! In succeeding revivals of religion, the like differences^p have sometimes taken place among the main instruments, and from as trivial causes ; and tho' they have not obtained without fault in some, and inconvenience to many, yet the event has proved them no hindrance upon the whole. The work has become more diffusive, and more incontestible, when persons of different tempers, sentiments and talents, who seemed to superficial observers as the heads of different parties, have laboured with equal zeal and success in advancing the one great design of the gospel. As a skilful gardener raises many plants in a little spot of ground, and removes them afterwards to places where they will have more room to grow and flourish ; so they, who are designed for extensive usefulness, are often first reared within a little compass, within the sight and knowledge of each other, where they are sheltered and strengthened, while tender, by their mutual advices, prayers and examples, and seem to have only one heart and one mind. But were

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^p To mention only one by anticipation—the unhappy dispute between Luther and Zuinglius, and their respective followers, concerning the words—This is my body. The difference between them was little more than imaginary, but the mischiefs it occasioned were real, important and numerous, and would probably have stifled the Reformation in its birth, if it had not been so remarkably under an almighty protection.

they always to continue thus closely connected, no one would have room to expand according to the measure of gifts and services which the Lord has appointed them, therefore they are thinned and transplanted: either persecutions from without, or weakneses, mistakes or jealousies among themselves, scatter them afar, to places and undertakings they had no thoughts of, and which would not have been otherwise attempted.

The apostle Paul, with his companion^a Silas, proceeded (as has been mentioned) thro' Syria and Cilicia, to the parts he had formerly visited. When he came to Lystra, he chose Timothy for his associate and companion in his journey, who it is probable had been converted by his ministry, and a witness to his sufferings for the gospel, when he was there before. Timothy was of Jewish extract by the mother's side, and carefully educated from his infancy in the knowledge of the scriptures; but his father was a Greek. This circumstance being generally known to the Jews, and likely to render him less acceptable among them, Paul, to obviate their prejudices, directed him to be circumcised, thus shewing his readiness to become all things to all men, so far as was consistent with a good conscience, and conducive to edification; for tho', when the observance of the Mosaic law was insisted on as necessary to salvation, he steadily opposed it, and would not admit the least addition to the doctrine

^a Acts 16.

doctrine of free justification by the blood of Christ, he was willing to permit it to the Jewish converts in their present situation, and to accommodate himself to their weakness, for their advantage. He had before withstood the circumcision of Titus (who was a Gentile) when it was urged as a necessary point, but now that debate was settled in favour of gospel liberty, he proposed the circumcision of Timothy himself. The seeming inconsistency of his conduct vanishes, if the difference of the two cases is rightly understood ; but those who act from the most enlarged principles, who know when and in what points resolution is necessary, and when and how far it is expedient to yield to others, will always be thought inconstant and inconsistent by the zealots of parties. In the course of his progress he delivered, in every city, the decree lately determined at Jerusalem, which, tho' primarily directed to Antioch, was of equal force, as a rule and bond of peace, in all places where there were both Jewish and Gentile converts. Thus having watered his former planting, he proceeded to preach in Phrygia and Galatia. The route of the gospel was directed by the spirit of God, who restrained the apostle from entering the province which is called, by way of distinction, the Proconsular Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital ; not that this country was to be excluded from the knowledge of Christ, for St. Paul preached in many parts of it

† See Acts 19. 10.

it afterwards with great success; but the proper season was not yet come, the Lord having an important service for them first in another place. For the same reason, and by the same influence, they were prevented going into Bythinia, which they had some thoughts of attempting. Thus, in a manner undetermined where they were to labour, they came to Troas, a sea-port in the Archipelago, and when their journey was now bounded by the sea, they received a farther intimation of the Lord's will, and found that he had been leading them in the right way, for they were brought to a port proper for embarking to the place where the Lord had designed to send them.

A. D. 51.] Here St. Paul had a vision by night, of a man standing by him, whose garb and expression intimated his country, and entreating him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. This vision was attended with such circumstances as left no room to doubt either its origin or meaning, so that, when he had communicated it to his companions, they assuredly collected that the Lord called them into Macedonia: accordingly they took shipping, and having a favourable wind, they soon arrived at Neapolis, from whence they proceeded by land to Philippi, a place of note, and a Roman colony. Their preaching and continuance in this city, which in time became the seat of a flourishing church, was
productive

productive of several interesting and important events.

On the sabbath day they went out of the city to a place by the river-side (a usual resort of the Jews for the exercise of public prayer) where meeting with some women (as it should seem) before the rest were assembled, they spake freely of the great subject, which was always uppermost in their hearts and mouths. One of them, named Lydia, a native of Thyatira, and then resident at Philippi, gave a peculiar attention to St. Paul's discourse : the reason is assigned, the Lord opened her heart. The rest heard the same words ; but the hearts of all are dull, contracted, and averse to spiritual truths, so that, without a divine interposition, the most powerful speakers speak in vain. Lydia heard to good purpose ; she believed, and was immediately baptized with her family, and gladly received the messengers of gospel grace into her house.

Continuing to preach in this place so long as they remained at Philippi, they were often met by a young woman under the influence of an evil spirit, who, as they passed by, cried after them, These men are the servants of the most high God, who declare unto us the way of salvation ; in like manner as the demoniacs had sometimes confessed our Saviour's authority and mission. It may seem strange that an evil spirit should testify in favour of the preachers of the gospel ; but perhaps, it was either to make them suspected of a confederacy,
or

or to draw them into a snare. However, when this had been often repeated, St. Paul, who could not bear to be spoken well of by a spirit which was not of God, commanded him, in the name of Jesus, to quit his possession. The spirit, compelled to obey, left the woman instantly ; but this opened a way to give them disturbance in another manner : her masters, to whom she had formerly brought great profit by her divining talent, finding she was no longer willing or able to procure them advantage by that means, apprehended Paul and Silas, as the chief instruments of their loss, and brought them before the magistrates with the heavy charge (which is usually reviv'd when the preaching of the gospel interferes with the views of interest) that they exceedingly disturbed the peace of the city, by attempting innovations contrary to the established religion : they stiled them Jews to the Romans, on account of their open abhorrence of idol worship, which was carefully supported by the Roman laws and customs. The unthinking multitude soon joined in the alarm, and the magistrates, easily prejudiced by the terms of the accusation, instead of acting as impartial judges, declared themselves parties in the affair. Without examining into particulars, they violently tore off the clothes of Paul and Silas, and having caused them to be beat with many stripes, they cast them into prison, giving the jailor a particular charge to keep them safely. This command was executed with

with severity; he thrust them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks: but no walls or dungeons can exclude those comforts of God's spirit which are promised to those who suffer for righteousness sake, and which are able to overpower the sense of every inconvenience. Paul and Silas were so little discomposed by this cruel treatment, that they joyfully sung hymns of praise to God, and were heard by the other prisoners, who probably were surprized at the chearfulness they expressed in such circumstances. But they were surprized much more at the testimony the Lord immediately gave in behalf of his servants; for while they were thus engaged, on a sudden the earth trembled; the very foundations of the prison were shaken, so that all the doors flew open, and every one's fetters and bonds were instantly loosed. The noise awakened the jailor, who, supposing the prisoners were all escaped, and dreading the consequences, in the first transports of his terror, drew his sword to slay himself; for so the false wisdom of the heathens, ignorant of the awful realities beyond the grave, taught men to avoid the pressure of present troubles, by desperately plunging themselves into an unknown eternity: but St. Paul, tho' in another part of the prison, and in the dark, was made acquainted with his purpose, and called out to him with a loud voice, Do thyself no harm, we are all here! It increased his surprize to find that his design was made known to them,

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and that those whom he had treated so hardly, should forget all their wrongs, and interest themselves in his preservation. Such an instance of forgiveness and tenderness to an enemy deeply affected him, and convinced him of the wrong he had done them, more forcibly than the sharpest expostulations could have done. This is indeed the peculiar triumph of a Christian, to overcome evil with good. He immediately called for lights, and, in agony of guilt and terror, sprung in, and cast himself at the feet of those over whom he had so lately tyrannized : after this expression of his respect and compunction for the injury he had done them, he brought them out, and addressed them with that question of the last importance to every awakened soul, Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? Paul and Silas, who had but one answer to this question, suited to every rank of life, and to sinners of every degree, directed him to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only and infallible means of salvation. This faith the Lord was pleased to give, so that, when he had brought them to his house, and heard them explain the doctrine more at large, he believed and was baptized, with all his family. Upon this his sorrow was turned into permanent joy ; and now it appeared why the Lord had permitted his servants to be thus rudely handled : amongst other reasons, it was on the account of this jailor, who would otherwise have remained a stranger to the gospel, if the Lord, in the
unsearchable

unsearchable riches of his mercy, had not thus sent it to him, and by the concurrent dispensations of his providence, disposed him to receive it with thankfulness, as life from the dead: it likewise proved the vanity of all attempts to suppress the truth. The magistrates and people abused the preachers and put them in prison, but the effect was quite contrary to their intentions, for by this means the jailor, the instrument of their cruelty, with his household, were converted, and thus the apostle's enemies, thro' the over-ruling hand of God, became subservient to his design, and helped him to some of the first members of his new church.

The jailor, thus made partaker of the faith, expressed his gratitude to his prisoners; he washed their stripes and set meat before them, and was soon freed from any suspence on their account; for in the morning the magistrate sent him orders to dismiss them from confinement. But St. Paul was willing to let them know that they had failed in their duty, and acted against those very laws and customs, of which, as Romans, they professed to be so tenacious. A citizen of Rome was not liable to bonds or scourging, and a subject of Rome, tho' not a citizen, could not be legally punished till he had been permitted to answer his accusers face to face (Acts 25. 16.) The apostle was injured in both these respects; they had punished him without trial, and they had bound and beat him, tho' he was a Roman: he therefore asserted his privilege.

He might have insisted on satisfaction, but he was a Christian, a willing disciple of a suffering Saviour; he had been once a persecutor himself, and had obtained forgiveness, therefore he found it easy to forgive. His remonstrance made the magistrates willing to submit to his terms; they came themselves, and honourably dismissed their prisoners, entreating them that, to prevent farther inconveniences, they would withdraw from the city, which they did, after they had taken leave of Lydia and the other disciples.

A. D. 52.] From hence passing thro' Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, the residence of the Roman governor. Here Paul, according to his usual custom, applying himself first to the Jews, discoursed and *reasoned* with them in their synagogue three successive sabbaths out of their own scriptures, opening* the true sense of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and then shewing their accomplishment in the person of Jesus. His labour was not wholly in vain; some of them believed and became disciples, but the rest,
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* Acts, ch. 17. v. 3. Opening and alledging; first explaining the true sense of the passage, and then laying down plain and undeniable deductions from it, applicable to the case in hand. Thus much is implied in the Greek words, *Διανοιγων και παρατιθεμεν*. A proper model for preachers and writers in divinity. How many controversies would cease, how much time would be redeemed, how many offences would be avoided, if it was universally followed, if the scriptures were explained in their true sense and connection, and nothing advanced but what could be fairly deduced from such an explanation.

and the greater part, discovered the indignation and enmity of their hearts against the truth. Under such leaders, the unthinking rabble are easily instigated to do mischief, so that they found no difficulty to raise a tumultuous mob, who assaulted the house of Jason, where Paul and Silas resided; but not finding them there, they forced away Jason and some of the new believers before the magistrates. The accusation was, that the preachers of the gospel, who, from the effect of their doctrine in disturbing the false peace of sin, began to be sufficiently described, when spoken of, as 'men who turned the world up-side down, and threw all into confusion wherever they appeared, were come thither also; that Jason had received and countenanced them, and that their fundamental tenets were inconsistent with obedience to government, since they professed and inculcated subjection to one Jesus, whom they stiled their king. By such misrepresentations the enemies of the gospel doctrine have often aimed to render it obnoxious to the civil powers. The rulers were alarmed at this accusation,

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It is still thought a sufficient and unanswerable objection against the preaching of the gospel, to say, These opinions cause divisions and seperations, and break the peace of families and communities. We may bring the point to a short issue. Did our Lord foretell this as one sure and perpetual consequence that would attend the prevalence of his gospel, or did he not? If he did not, what is the meaning of Matt. 12. 34—36? If he did, then by what name are we to call that manner of preaching which has either no tendency, or no power, to disturb the false and dangerous peace of a wicked world.

cufation, but being unwilling to proceed to extremities, tho' obliged to take some notice of what seemed to affect the interest of Cæſar, they took ſufficient ſecurity of Jaſon and the reſt for their good behaviour, and diſmiſſed them without farther trouble. In the mean time Paul and Silas, againſt whom the violence had been chiefly intended, were ſent ſafely away by the brethren to Berea, where, regardless of their paſt dangers and ſufferings, they purſued their endeavours to recommend the goſpel to the Jews; and in this place they met with a friendly reception. It is ſaid the Bereans were more noble than thoſe of Theſſalonica; for to be open to conviction and information is the mark of a noble mind: they were of a more free and ingenuous temper, not ſlaves to the fear of man or the power of prejudice; they heard with candour, and examined the ſcriptures themſelves to find the truth. The goſpel of Chriſt is ſuited to give the fullreſt ſatisfaction to enquirers of this ſpirit; accordingly many of them believed. But when the Jews of Theſſalonica were informed of this, they followed Paul thither, with a view to repeat the part they had acted in their own city; but they came too late: Paul had already planted the goſpel, and leaving Silas and Timothy, who were leſs obnoxious, to remain a little longer with the brethren, he was conducted firſt towards the ſea, to elude the attempts of his enemies, and afterwards to Athens; a city which, for its eminence in literature

literature and all the polite arts, was stilled, by general consent, *The seat of the Muses*.

While the apostle waited at Athens for the arrival of Silas and Timothy, his spirit was enflamed with a lively concern for the honour of God and the welfare of souls: it grieved him to see a city, so famed for refinement and philosophy, wholly given to idolatry, and, with respect to the most important concerns of life, quite upon a level with the most ignorant barbarians. St. Paul is generally allowed, by those who will allow him little else, to have been a man of taste and letters. He was now at Athens, the school of philosophy and center of the fine arts: painting, statuary, architecture and elegance appeared in every quarter; but the affecting observation he had made of the state of the inhabitants, so filled his mind, that he could take little notice of any thing else. To those who understand the nearness and importance of an eternal state, the highest improvements of unsanctified reason afford little more entertainment than the trivial sports of children, or the more wretched amusements of lunatics. He was so struck with the ignorance, superstition and wickedness of the *people*, that he could relish none of the beauties of the place, but, full of a different emotion, compassionately laboured to inspire them with true wisdom. He was soon encountered by the Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers, the respectable advocates for those principles of pleasure and pride, to one or the other of

which all men are enslaved, till the gospel sets them free. Here, in some measure, accommodating himself to the prevailing taste, he reasoned with the reasoners, and silenced the wise men of the world, in their own way, by dint of argument: but the contest was unequal, their syllogisms soon failed them, and they were forced to retreat to their last refuge, an affected wit and raillery. Unable to answer the force of his discourses, they triumphed without a victory, and expressed their contempt of him and his doctrine by a word of the lowest and most despicable signification, which our version not improperly renders, *a Babler*; but perhaps no term in our language can sufficiently express the poignancy of the original. Others so entirely mistook the state of the question, that they thought he was a publisher or setter forth of strange gods; they thought that Jesus and the Resurrection were deities they had not before heard of; and his discourse always turning upon these topics, they concluded (indeed with reason) that his only business and desire was to proclaim to all, the Divinity whom he worshipped. And it is no wonder that, from a half-attention to his words, they should be induced to personify the Resurrection as a deity, since the heathens had altars erected not only to Honour, Virtue and Liberty, but to the vices and disorders of human nature, such as Fear, Shame, Famine and Fevers.

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This weak mistake gave occasion to summon him before the council who bore the name of Areopagus, or the Hill of *Mars*, from the place where they met; an assembly in high estimation for authority and wisdom, and whose particular office it was to superintend the public religion, and preserve it from innovation. It does not appear, however, that he underwent a formal tryal before them. His opponents seemed rather disposed to gratify their curiosity than their malice: their politeness, perhaps, made them something averse to the severer forms of persecution, and content with the less invidious (tho' to many not less formidable) methods of scorn and ridicule. Their prevailing passion was the love of novelty; they spent their time in telling or hearing some new, or, as the Greek expresses it, some newer thing. The expected news lost its relish the moment it was known, and they were always in search of something *newer still*; therefore the gospel, tho' the strongest, as well as the most important news they had ever met with, could not engage such volatile minds: while it was the newer thing, the freshest news, they were content to listen, but as soon as they were satisfied what it was, they wanted to hear something else. The apostle no where met with so little success as amongst this polite, learned, ignorant people; and wherever this Athenian spirit prevails, it retards the success of the gospel more than all the arts and violence of persecution.

The discourse of the apostle on this occasion is equally a standard of fine address and of just reasoning. He had observed their religious rites and worship with attention, and had selected from among their numerous altars, the one which was most fit for his purpose. The beauty of his exordium is obscured by the expression, *too superstitious*, in our version; the Greek word, to which it answers, is ambiguous, and suited to bespeak a favourable hearing, rather than importing an abrupt reproof. *q. d.* I perceive indeed, Athenians, that you are observant of the invisible powers in an unusual manner, for, besides the variety of temples and altars which you have, in common with other cities of Greece, I observed one with a peculiar inscription, To the unknown God: this God, as yet unknown to you, is he whom I serve, and the new doctrine, of which you ask me, relates to his will and worship. This was the most happy and pertinent medium to enlarge from that could be imagined; the Athenians, always eager to hear some newer thing, expected an account of new deities, but Paul referred them to an altar and inscription among themselves, which, meerly by being obvious, had escaped their reflection. It is to be feared that this observation and inscription may suit the devotions of many who think themselves Christians. The same address is visible in his whole argument. To the Jews he quoted the books of the holy scripture, but with these heathens he appealed to the

the volume of creation, and argued from the impresses of power, wisdom and goodness every where displayed before their eyes, the excellence and independence of their great author, how little he stood in need of men, and how unworthy of his divine majesty all their laborious inventions were, while they thought to honour him by worshipping the works of their own hands: he asserted the providence and omnipresence of God, that he was the fountain of life and all its comforts, the supreme disposer of all events, and the common father of mankind, confirming this part of his doctrine by a quotation from Aratus, one of their own poets. He afterwards proceeded to the topics of revelation, a resurrection to future life, and a final judgment by the man Christ Jesus. It would require too much room to point out particularly the spirit, propriety and evidence of this short sermon. But no oratory or reasoning can change the heart. The effect was the same as may be observed amongst ourselves, when much inferior instruments declare the truths of God: some mocked, and accounted this wisdom the merest folly; others, pleased with his *manner*, and perhaps affected with some transient emotions of mind, expressed a willingness to hear him again; and a few, a very few, believed, among whom was Dionyzius, one of the Areopagite judges.

Having so little encouragement to prolong his stay at Athens, the apostle proceeded to Corinth, at that time accounted the chief city

of Greece. Here he unexpectedly found companions prepared for him^u. Aquila, a native of Pontus; by birth a Jew, with Priscilla his wife, had received the faith of the gospel in Italy, from whence they had lately been constrained to remove by an edict of the emperor, enjoining all Jews to depart from Rome. Whether the Christians were particularly aimed at by the name of Jews in this decree, is uncertain; but as their Lord and Master had lived in Judea, and the first preachers and converts were generally of that nation, perhaps likewise, because they asserted and proved their doctrines from those books for which the Jews professed the highest veneration, the christians were for some time considered as Jews by most of the heathens. This happy pair, partners in faith and affection, were led by that Divine Providence which certainly, tho' secretly, guides the steps of his servants, to seek a retreat in Corinth, about the time St. Paul arrived there. They soon became acquainted, and of course, intimate. He often mentions them in his writings, as having, upon many occasions, afforded him help and comfort; for, as in nature, so in grace, none are so sufficient to themselves, but they may be glad of assistance from others, even from such as are, in many respects, their inferiors. They abode and wrought together, being of the same business; for tho' St. Paul well understood his liberty, and that, as a preacher of the

^u Acts, chap. 18.

the gospel, he had a right to expect maintenance from those to whom he ministered, yet he condescended to work, as a common handicraft, at the employment of making tents. One reason of his submitting to this, he informs us himself, was a prudent precaution to obviate any insinuations that might be raised or received against him, of a design to make gain of godliness, or to abuse his influence to mercenary purposes. But his example may farther teach us, that secular employments are not *in themselves* incompatible with a faithful and regular discharge of the gospel ministry, when the circumstances of the times may so require. But his main and proper business, to which he always attended in ^w season and out of season, was preaching the gospel of Christ. To this he addressed himself at Corinth, first (as usual) to the Jews, being pressed in spirit, borne on by a constraining sense of the love of Christ and the worth of souls, and probably more confirmed

^w 2 Tim. 4. 2. Be instant, in season and *out of season*; not unseasonably, as supposing a time in which it would be better to forbear, but *in season*, at set and stated times, and *out of season*, that is occasionally. Improve every opportunity that offers, not on the Lord's day only, but on any other, not only in a solemn and full discourse, but let the glory of God and the good of souls be your scope in every conversation! It answers to the account the apostle gives of his own conduct: he preached publicly and from house to house, by night and by day, Acts 20. 20, 31. As a physician, besides his ordinary round of practice, is ready to afford his help upon every sudden application, this should be the aim of a gospel minister, he should be constant to all his stated appointments, and willing to make the most of every unexpected call to service.

confirmed and warmed by the accounts brought him by Timothy and Titus, who rejoined him here from Macedonia. Animated, rather than discouraged, by the opposition he had formerly met with, he strenuously urged to the Jews, from their own scriptures, the proofs that Jesus was the Messiah, with such evidence as must have gained their assent, had they not been hardened and obstinate; but when they persisted in returning contradiction and despite to his repeated labours of love, he at length gave them up, and told them, that having discharged his duty and his conscience, their blood would be upon their own heads, that their guilt was most aggravated and their destruction approaching, and that, for the future, he would frequent their synagogues no more, but address himself to the Gentiles. He accordingly preached in the house of one Justus, near the synagogue, and tho' most of the Jews were hardened beyond the reach of conviction, yet the Lord had a small remnant amongst them here likewise. Crispus, a chief ruler, or president of the synagogue, believed, with all his house, and of the heathens many were converted and baptized.

If Corinth was less celebrated than Athens for philosophy and science, it was more so for riches and luxury, which are no less powerful hindrances to the reception of the truth. This consideration, join'd to the violent spirit of his opposers, might perhaps have prompted him to a speedy departure; but the Lord, whom
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he served, appeared to him in a vision, and bid him not be afraid or discouraged, but continue to preach, assuring him his labour should not be in vain; for, tho' present appearances might promise but little success, [*A. D. 53.*] he had many people known to himself in that proud, sensual, idolatrous city. It signifies but little, what enemies or difficulties a faithful minister may be threatened with, if the Lord has many people in that place; he who sent him to call them out of darkness into his marvellous light, will support and defend him, so that either none shall rise against him, or at least none be able to prevail to his real harm. That the people, whom the Lord here spoke of as his own, were no better, either by nature or practice, than others, is plain, from what the apostle reminds them of after their conversion, 1 Cor. 6. 9—11. We^{*} learn from the same epistle, that his conflicts and exercises at this time were very great. Supported, however, by such a seasonable and gracious encouragement, he remained there a year and half; and all the efforts of his enemies were insufficient, either to damp his zeal and activity, or to prevent the success of his labours, tho' the Lord permitted them to try what they could do, and thereby more clearly shewed, that the safety of his servants depends on himself.

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia (who, as it seems by Luke's expression, entered upon his

* 1 Cor. 2. 3.

his government during the apostle's abode at Corinth) the Jews appeared tumultuously before the tribunal, with the old accusation, that he subverted the laws of Moses. Gallio prevented Paul's intended defence, and refused to interfere in points foreign to the Roman laws: he said, that if their charge had been laid for any trespass or immorality, he would readily have taken cognizance of the affair, but should leave them to settle their religious disputes between themselves. With this reprimand he dismissed, or rather drove them from his presence. The conduct of Gallio in this affair has been considered in different lights, and praised or censured accordingly. History gives him a fair character for equity and moderation; and it must be allowed he judged right, in refusing to interpose the civil authority to give sanction to persecution: yet he seems, upon this occasion, to have discovered that political indifference which has prompted so many great and wise men, in the world's estimation, to treat the gospel as a trivial scheme unworthy their notice: he rather shewed contempt than impartiality; he would not hear either party, because he despised both, and therefore drove them away with scorn. In fine, the Jews not only failed in their design, but were themselves assaulted by some of the inhabitants, who beat Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, even in the open court, and Gallio, tho' he saw it, cared for none of these things; which is a farther proof that he was influenced by
some

some other motives than impartiality and a regard to justice, or he would not have suffered his authority to be insulted, and a person (upon his own principles innocent) abused before his face. ' I suppose (tho' it is a controverted point) that the Sosthenes here mentioned was at that time an enemy to Paul, and joined in the prosecution attempted against him. Perhaps he was afterwards converted, and accompanied the apostle in his travels, as this name is prefixed, with his own, to his first epistle to the Corinthians.

NERO, *A. D.* 54.] St. Paul, after about two years stay in Greece, from his first landing at Macedonia, embarked at Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, intending for Syria. In this voyage they touched at Ephesus, the chief city of the Proper or Proconsular Asia. Here, as in other places, he entered into the Jews synagogues, desirous, if possible, to lead them to the knowledge of the Messiah. At this city he left his dear companions Aquila and Priscilla, who would willingly have detained him longer; but St. Paul, having formed the plan of his progress, in such manner as he judged most suitable to his main design, readily sacrificed the dictates of affection to the calls of duty, and persisted in his purpose to be at Jerusalem on the approaching passover: he took leave of them therefore with a promise of returning at a proper time, and proceeding on his voyage, landed at Cæsarea, from whence he went to Jerusalem. His stay here was not long:
having

having answered the design of his journey, and conversed with the brethren, he revisited the places where he had formerly preached, and went first to Antioch, and from thence thro' the provinces of Galatia and Phrygia. In this circuit he lost no time, but published the glad tidings of salvation, and confirmed the hearts of the disciples, wherever he came.

While he was on this service, there came to Ephesus a Jew of Alexandria, named Apollos; he had been as yet only instructed in the rudiments of the faith, so far as was communicated by the teaching and baptism of John; but tho' his knowledge was not extensive, his zeal was lively and fervent, and having a prompt elocution, and great readiness in the scriptures, he preach'd concerning Christ with much freedom and earnestness, according to the measure of light he had received. Aquila and Priscilla were amongst his hearers, and having more experience and knowledge than himself, they easily perceived wherein he was deficient, and, with candour and tenderness, instructed him farther. This passage is worthy the notice both of preachers and hearers. What Apollos had learnt he willingly communicated; what he was yet ignorant of, he as willingly received when proposed to him; his zeal and humility went hand in hand. This is an amiable and thriving character. The man who is faithful to present light, and open to farther conviction, will soon be wise and successful; the Lord will provide him both teachers and hearers;

hearers ; he shall profit others and be profited himself every day. The prudence and moderation of Aquila and Priscilla are no less commendable ; they did not acquiesce in all he said because he was eloquent and mighty in the scriptures, neither did they reject and disdain him because they knew more than he, much less expose and revile him as a low ignorant preacher, but they spoke to him in private ; they approved what was right, and shewed him mildly and faithfully wherein he was defective : they commended his zeal, and improved his knowledge. With these advantages, and letters of recommendation to the brethren, he went from thence to Corinth, where he was highly serviceable to the church, publicly maintaining and proving, against the Jews, with great earnestness of spirit and strength of argument, that Jesus was the Messiah.

Not long after his departure^y, Paul, having completed his progress thro' the upper or interior parts of Asia Minor, returned, according to his promise, to Ephesus. Here he found some more disciples, who, like Apollos, tho' acquainted with the doctrine and baptism of John, were hitherto strangers to those peculiar gifts, graces and comforts, which, as the fruits of the Holy Spirit, were bestowed on the believers in Jesus ; but, by the imposition of the apostle's hands, they were immediately made partakers of the same benefits.

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A. D. 55.] The apostle, unwilling to give up his own people, the Jews, continued his labours of love among them for three months, if, by any means, he might bring them to the acknowledgment of the truth; but at length perceiving that, instead of yielding, they hardened themselves still more, and obstinately laboured to traduce and defame the author and way of salvation before the people, he finally desisted, and selecting those who had received the gospel from the many who might hinder and confuse them, he formed them into a society among themselves. He continued daily to preach and defend the gospel, for two years afterwards, in a public school, with indefatigable zeal and diligence, seconding his more stated services with occasional and pressing exhortations from house to house, and watering the seed with many prayers and tears. His labours were not in vain; he had great success not only in the city of Ephesus, but amongst many, who, resorting thither from other parts, and with different views, were providentially led to hear him, and being divinely convinced themselves, carried home the joyful tidings with them: so that the knowledge of the gospel was generally spread throughout the province. The attention of the people was still farther excited, and their prejudices softened by the numerous displays and visible tendency of that divine power, by which the Lord confirmed the words of his servant. Many striking miracles, emblematical of the healing efficacy
of

of gospel grace, were wrought by the most inconsiderable means ; so that persons afflicted with various maladies, or possessed by evil spirits, were perfectly restored to health, by the application of handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his body.

Among the various methods by which the gospel has been opposed, one is by a feeble imitation and a pretended acknowledgment of some of its principles, while the heart is unacquainted or unaffected with the design and scope of the whole doctrine. Enmity, or at best, interest, is often the spring of many attempts that are veiled under a fair profession of good words ; but such attempts will always issue in the disappointment or confusion of those who venture on them. An instance of this kind happened at Ephesus : Some vagrant Jews, who made claim to a power of exorcising or dispossessing evil spirits, struck with the miracles wrought in the name of Jesus, presumed to adopt this sacred name into the number of their professed mysteries, and meeting with a fit subject for the exercise of their art, they undertook to adjure the evil spirit to depart from a man, by the name of Jesus whom Paul preached ; but the man, under the influence of the evil spirit, insulted and exposed them ; he acknowledged the authority of Jesus and the fidelity of Paul, but demanding farther who they were that durst make free with these names, far from obeying their summons, he fiercely assaulted them, and forced them, tho'

seven in number, to flee for their lives, naked, wounded and terrified. Great indeed is the power of the name of Jesus, but when not pronounced by faith it is spoken in vain : Satan laughs at such vain pretenders, and prevails against them. So, when those who are destitute of faith, undertake to write or preach concerning Jesus, it will seldom prove to more purpose than if they attempted to exorcise the people ; instead of delivering others from the power of Satan, they are more and more subjected to him themselves, and, unless the grace of God interposes to teach them better, their latter end is usually worse than their beginning.

This public defeat of the enemy added to the triumph of the gospel and the honour of the apostle, and produced a reverence and awe in the hearts of many, convincing them of the power of evil spirits when not restrained, and the danger of trifling with the name or ministry of Christ ; and many who had been addicted to the magic arts (for which Ephesus was peculiarly infamous) renounced their delusions, confessed their folly and wickedness to the apostle, made public profession of the gospel, and, in proof that their faith and repentance were sincere, brought the books containing the secrets and principles of their pretended skill, and publicly committed them to the flames. These were either so numerous, or so dear, that the value was computed at fifty thousand pieces of silver : what this sum might be in our money, the learned are not agreed ;

agreed ; the lowest calculations fix it at about fifteen hundred pounds, while some compute it at more than seven thousand. We are not, however, sure they were all on the subject of magic, a variety of other disquisitions might possibly contribute to enlarge the pile. Curious books and curious arts had been multiplied, but the one book of truth now made the rest useless and tasteless ; they had now found the pearl of great price, and willingly parted with their once-admired pebbles : and we may believe, that if the worth and power of the holy scriptures were once generally known, many curious libraries, in our days, if they escaped unburnt, would at least remain unread and unnoticed. When the wise thus renounced their wisdom, and the artful their gain, burnt their books with their own hands, and devoted themselves to the study of the scriptures alone, it is once more observed, So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed !

A. D. 57.] The apostle, of whom it may be said, with more propriety than of Cæsar, that he accounted nothing done while any thing remained to do, in the midst of his important engagements at Ephesus, was still meditating new services ; he retained a warm affection and care for his friends in different, distant, and opposite quarters ; he had thoughts of revisiting Macedonia and Greece, and, from thence, once more to go to Jerusalem ; and, not content with reviewing his past labours, he

longed to preach in places he had not yet seen —saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome : nor was Rome the boundary of his views, for from thence he proposed to proceed to Spain². We are taught from our infancy to admire those who, in the language of the world, are stiled great captains and conquerors, because they burned with a desire to carry slaughter and terror into every part of the globe, and to aggrandize their names by the depopulation of countries, and the destruction of their species, while this generous spirit of St. Paul is almost totally overlooked : unwearied by difficulties, undismayed by dangers, unsatisfied with the greatest success, unaffected with the justest applause, he seemed to lay his benevolent schemes wide as the human race : he reaped no profit, he sought no praise, he rejected the allurements of pleasure (to which the greatest conquerors have often been irresolute slaves) he endured the reproach and contempt of the people, which no hero, but the true Christian, was ever strong enough to bear with patience, and all this only to make others partakers of the happiness which he enjoyed himself. However, finding it necessary to continue some time longer where he was, he dispatched his beloved Timothy to Macedonia, to apprize his friends of his intention, and to prepare them for his visit, when a proper opportunity should permit.

In

² Rom. 15. 24.

In the mean time, an incident fell out which well illustrates the causes and genius of that opposition and outcry which is usually made when the power of gospel truth interferes with the passions and interests of designing men. St. Paul's great success, and the additions daily made to the church of Christ, had a visible tendency to lessen the estimation and gain of those, whose chief resource was in the ignorance and wickedness of the people. These were not backward to take the alarm, and had been waiting an opportunity to shew their resentment. The Lord, who holds all hearts in his own hands, had restrained them hitherto, that his work of grace might not be disturbed; but when the apostle was upon the point of departure, this restraint was in some measure taken off. The temple of Diana at Ephesus was celebrated for its magnificence far and near, so that many shrines or models of it were made for sale, and in much demand. This branch of business brought in considerable gain to the silversmiths and other mechanics; but if the gospel of Christ continued to spread, it was highly probable that these, with many other such toys, would be little enquired after. Demetrius, a leading man amongst them, convening his brethren and dependents, and as many as he could whose interest seemed most immediately affected by this novel doctrine, harangued them with much address and influence on a point in which they had so near and mutual a concern; he reminded them,

with a seasonable frankness, that their gain was at stake: this was the main argument; yet, as one not wholly governed by mercenary views, he express'd a very tender concern for the honour of Diana, lest her worship and their advantage should cease together, as they certainly would, if this Paul should be peaceably suffered to persuade the people, that they can be no gods which are made with hands. An appeal to the two prevailing passions of mankind, interest and superstition, is seldom made in vain. The arguments of Demetrius have been employed a thousand times over against the gospel, tho' all opposers have not had his honesty, in avowing their leading motive. The doctrine which discountenances folly and wickedness will certainly be defamed and resisted by all who find their account in promoting them; but as this motive is rather invidious, if insisted on alone, they express likewise an earnest zeal for whatever tenets have the sanction of authority, antiquity or custom, with which their private interest is inseparably connected. He had said enough to inflame his hearers, and these were sufficiently numerous to stimulate the unthinking rabble, who, tho' quiet till they are headed by artful leaders,

* This is the main objection against the gospel, tho' pretexts are industriously sought to hide it; it alarms those who thrive by the ignorance or wickedness of the times: gain is the motive, the honour of Diana the plea. But it may be easily proved, that such occupations as are endangered by the success of the gospel, are in themselves injurious to the peace and good order of civil society.

leaders, are easily roused to rage and tumult when thus influenced, as the sea that has been long calm obeys the impulse of the rising gale. The outcry began by Demetrius and his companions, Great is Diana of the Ephesians, was soon resounded thro' the city, and the multitude being informed that their established religion, their stately temple and costly rites were all in danger, rushed from all parts tumultuously into the public theatre, dragging two of St. Paul's dear companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, along with them, perhaps with a design to throw them to the wild beasts, which were kept for the barbarous diversion of the people at their public games. The apostle, warmly concerned for his friends safety, and confiding in the goodness of his cause and the providence of his God, was not intimidated by this violent uproar, but purposed to face the enraged mob; but the earnest solicitations of the disciples, who could not but be anxious for the event, restrained him: and even some who had not received his doctrine, from a regard to what they knew of his character and conduct, employ'd their endeavours to preserve him. These, in the text, are stiled Asiarchs, persons of note who presided in the regulation of the games. Some of them sent to inform him, that in the present confusion it was not in their power to protect him from violence, and therefore desired he would keep in safety. Tho' his resolution was not shaken, yet judging this might be a providential intimation, that

it was not his duty at that time to expose himself, he desisted. The mob, thus disappointed with respect to him, and secretly restrained from hurting the others, continued in the utmost confusion, tho' few knew why they were assembled, unless it was to join in the cry, Great is Diana of the Ephesians, which they repeated, without intermission, for two hours. When they had thus exhausted themselves, and their passions, thro' weariness, began to subside, a public officer of the city seized the favourable moment to expostulate with them concerning their behaviour; he spoke with freedom and address, but with that indifference which the wise men of the world so frequently discover in religious concerns. Many deserve commendation for their readiness to allow others the peaceable possession of their own sentiments, who, at the same time, call for our pity, that they have no inclination or leisure to enquire for themselves. He allowed, in general terms, the honours of Diana, and pleaded in behalf of the men, that they had not spoke against Diana in particular, or intermeddled with her temple^b. This was probably true in fact: St. Paul declared the folly of idolatry in general, but did not enter into direct confutation of any detached part of the heathen mythology.

^b *Are neither robbers of churches*, ver. 37. should rather be rendered *Robbers of temples*; for tho' the word church is now expressive of some particular places of worship, it is never, in the New Testament, applied to buildings, but to persons only.

mythology; he proposed the plain truth of the gospel, and when this was received, the whole system of idol worship fell to the ground of itself. He farther reminded them, that if they had any just cause of complaint, they ought to seek redress in a course of law^c; and then hinting at the consequences they were liable to, if called to a strict account^d for their riot, he prevailed on them to separate and depart quietly. Thus the apostle, tho' threaten'd with a most imminent and formidable danger, was preserved unhurt, and suffered neither in his person nor character. An encouraging proof that those who act in the path of duty, and depend on the power of God, are equally safe in all times and circumstances; no less safe, when surrounded by enraged enemies, than when encircled by kind and assiduous friends.

He did not continue long at Ephesus after this tumult, but, taking leave of the disciples, he went to Troas, and from thence (as he had purposed) to Macedonia^e. We have but little account of this progress in the history of the Acts, but from some passages of
of

^c The servants of Christ will seldom be compelled to answer for themselves in a course of law, except in those places where sanguinary laws are contrived purposely against them. In default of these, their adversaries will often stoop to appeal from the magistrate to the mob. ^d It seems, however, there was no more said of it. It had been a notorious breach of the peace, but then it had been against St. Paul and his companions, who had sufficient favour shewn them if they came off with their lives. In any other case, such a tumult would have been deemed an high offence.

^e Acts 20.

of his epistles^f; written about that time, we are informed that his exercises and trials, both inward and outward, were very great. His solicitous affection for the churches was far from being the smallest source of his troubles, and cost him many^g a pang: he loved them in the bowels of Jesus Christ; he could willingly have devoted his labours and life to each of them, but he could not be with them all; and knowing the weakness of the heart, the subtlety of Satan, and the obvious temptations arising from the fear of man, the love of the world, and the arts of false teachers, he was jealous over those from whom he was absent with a godly jealousy^h. At Troas he expected to have met with Titus, on his return from Macedonia, but missing him, tho' he had favourable opportunities of preaching the gospel atⁱ Troas, his mind was not at liberty to improve them, but he hastened to be in Macedonia, that he might the sooner be satisfied. There he tells us himself, he had no rest, but was troubled

^f 2 Cor. 2. 12, 13. and 7. 5. ^g See 2 Cor. 11. 28.
That which cometh on me daily. The word is *σπουδαίω*
—and gives the idea of a camp or castle hard beset with continual onsets and assaults; or of a man who has his way to force thro' a great crowd that are coming to meet him, so that he must not only be much encumbered and hindered, but, unless he exerts himself to the utmost, is in danger of being trampled under their feet. By this lively figure the apostle describes the part he took in the welfare of all the churches. His cares on their behalf were so numerous, urgent and continual, that they found full employment for his prayers, his thoughts and his time.

^h 2 Cor. 11. 1. ⁱ 2 Cor. 2. 12, 13.

troubled on every side, without were fightings, within were fears; but he speaks of it as a seasonable and gracious interposition of that God, whose character^{*} and prerogative it is to be a comforter of those that are cast down; that in these circumstances he was comforted by the coming of Titus, who relieved his fears by the favourable account he brought him from Corinth.

A. D. 58.] How long he staid in these parts we are not told, but, in general, that he spent some time and visited many places; and it seems to have been in this circuit that he preached in Illyricum, a part of which country borders upon Macedonia. He afterwards proceeded to Greece, where he staid three months. He intended to have embarked from thence at some port; and to have proceeded immediately to Syria by sea; but upon information that his restless enemies, the Jews, were plotting to intercept and kill him, he determined to return thro' Macedonia. Several of his friends offered to accompany him thro' Asia, who embarking before him, waited for him at Troas, where he, at a convenient time, join'd them from Philippi, and remained there seven days.

On the first day of the week they had a solemn assembly, and St. Paul, who was to take a long and last farewell of the disciples there the next morning, indulged his own and their affections, by protracting his discourses and advices beyond the usual bounds; he spent the whole

^{*} 2 Cor. 7. 6.

whole day, even till midnight, in expatiating upon the pleasing topics of redeeming love. This does not indeed appear to have been his usual practice ; but should a company of believers now spend a night together in the exercises they best love, tho' it were but once, and when they had no expectation of meeting again, till they should meet in glory, it would be sufficient to open the mouths of prejudice and slander against them, as regardless of the order of families, and the duties of common life. Particular notice is taken that they had many lights in the upper chamber where they were met, perhaps to remind us that the first Christians were careful to conduct their assemblies with order and propriety, so as to give no just cause of offence ; yet their enemies quickly began to charge them with meeting in the dark, and invented many false and wicked slanders upon that supposition. The like falsehoods have been often repeated. A young man of the company, either less attentive, or less warmly engaged than the rest, dropped asleep, and not only lost much of an invaluable opportunity, but fell out of a window in which he was seated, from the third story, and was taken up to appearance dead : an incident which might have given those who hated the apostle a farther occasion to clamour, and to revile his unseasonable zeal ; but he went down in the spirit of faith and prayer, and embracing the young man, restored him to his friends alive. After they were recovered
from

from the hurry of this event, and had taken some refreshment, he resumed his discourse, and continued in conference¹ with them till the break of day, when he bid them farewell.

His companions went along the coast by shipping to Assos, a place not very distant, and to which the apostle chose to go by land, and on foot. Some think he did this by way of self-denial, but it is not likely that he, who was the great asserter of evangelical and filial liberty, would lay any stress upon such singularities. Self may readily submit to many things of this sort, and derive food, complacency and strength from them. It is more probable he chose to walk, either that he might embrace occasions of service by the way, or for the advantage of leisure and retirement; for Christians engaged in a very public sphere of life (as he was) are glad to redeem opportunities of being alone, at the price of some inconveniences. But this circumstance is mentioned as characterizing the simplicity of his spirit; tho' greatly honoured and greatly beloved, he thought it not beneath him to walk from place to place, like an obscure person.

Embarking

¹ This, as we have observed, was upon a particular occasion; they expected to see each other no more, and hardly knew how to part. The like circumstances might justify such protracted meetings of christian friends still, but in general they are to be avoided: if frequently indulged they would break in upon other things, indispose those who attend for the ordinary duties of their stations; be prejudicial to health, and for these and other reasons prove a cause of offence.

Embarking at Assos, and having touched at Mitylene and Samos, intermediate places, they arrived in a few days at Miletus. St. Paul purposely passed Ephesus, that he might not be detained or grieved by the many dear friends he had in that city, for he was resolved, if possible, to be at Jerusalem on the approaching day of Pentecost; but from Miletus he sent for the elders or bishops of the church at Ephesus, to receive his final charge and benediction. When they came he addressed them in a solemn and affectionate discourse. The substance of it, which is recorded for our instruction, if considered only as a piece of oratory, has been often admired and celebrated by critics: but there are strokes in it, the force and beauty of which no critic can truly relish, except he has tasted of the same spirit which filled and animated the apostle's heart when he spoke it.

He began with an appeal to themselves concerning his conduct while resident among them, and reminded them of the diligence, fidelity and tenderness which he had manifested in the course of his ministry; how he had seconded his public instructions with private and repeated exhortations, watering them both with many prayers and tears: he informed them of the *object* and service of his present journey, and how uncertain he was what the issue might prove to himself. But tho' he had general intimations from the spirit of God, to expect afflictions and bonds in every place, his determination

mination was fixed; he had counted the cost, and saw that nothing he could meet with was worth his serious thought, so that he might be able to fulfil his ministry with honour, and to finish his course with joy^m; but this he said he was assured of, that the pleasing opportunities he had enjoyed with the believers at Ephesus, and in that neighbourhood, were ended, and that they now saw and heard him for the last time. Only those who know the endeared affection that subsists between a minister of Christ, and those to whom God has made him the instrument of saving their souls, can judge of the emotion with which he spoke, and his friends heard, this part of his discourse. When he had thus touched and engaged their tenderest passions, and prepared them to receive his parting solemn charge with a due attention, he exhorted them, in the most animated terms, to follow his example, in performing the part of faithful overseers, or bishops, in the church which he now committed to their care, suggesting two most powerful motives,

^m The state of obedience and service which we owe to him who died for us, and rose again, is often compared to a race or course; by which is intimated, the assiduity with which we ought to pursue our calling, the brevity of our labours and sufferings, the little attention we should pay to objects around us, and that our eye and aim should be constantly directed to the prize set before us. Every step in this race is attended with trouble, but the end will be unspeakable joy. Those to whom the King shall say, Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord! will not then complain of the difficulties they met by the way.

motives, the consideration that they were appointed to this office by the Holy Ghost, and that the souls entrusted to them were the church of God, which he had purchased with his own blood : he likewise warned them, that the utmost circumspection would be needful, for that he foresaw that after his departure grievous wolves would enter amongst them, not sparing the flock, and also that out of their own number of professed disciples, men should arise speaking perverse things. This double danger of false teachers from without, and restless curious spirits within the fold, all societies of Christians are exposed to; and it is a strong call to ministers, in all ages, to be mindful of the apostle's charge, and to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. He again put them in remembrance of his own conduct, his assiduity and disinterestedness; that he had not sought his own advantage, but had rather wrought with his own hands that he might not be chargeable to them : finally, commending them to God, and the word of his grace, he closed his discourse, with proposing to their considerations an aphorism of our Lord Jesus, and illustrated by the whole tenor of his life, It is more blessed to give than to receive. This sentiment, so highly expressive of the spirit of the Divine Author, which had been hitherto preserved in the hearts and mouths of his disciples, was, upon this occasion, inserted into the written word, and is the only authentic tradition

tradition concerning him which has been transmitted to the church. Having finished his pathetic address, he kneeled down and prayed with them. The final farewell was very affecting ; for how could those who owed him their souls, who had been so often comforted and edified by his instructions and example, consider that they were to see him no more in this world, without being greatly moved ? They accompanied him to the ship, and then returned. The word which Luke the historian makes use of upon this occasion, intimates that the concern was mutual ; it signifies, to draw asunder by force, to separate things closely joined together. *When we had gotten from them*, or, as it might be rendered, *When we had torn ourselves from them*, well expresses the close union of their affections, and the sorrow and reluctance which both sides felt at parting.

When this struggleⁿ was over, St. Paul and his company put to sea with a favourable gale, and having touched at Coos and Rhodes, two islands of note in the Ægean sea, continued their course to Patara in Lycia, where they seasonably met with a ship upon the point of departure for Phœnicia, and embarking in her, they passed on the south side of Cyprus, and had a safe voyage to Tyre, which being the destined port of the vessel, they landed. As he was now not very far distant from Jerusalem, and had finished that part of his voyage in

ⁿ Acts, ch. 21.

which he was most exposed to unavoidable delays by the occurrences of winds and weather, so that he had a fair probability of reaching Jerusalem within his prescribed time, he consented to stay seven days with some disciples^o he found there. From some of these he received an intimation, by a prophetic impulse, of the dangers he would be exposed to if he went to Jerusalem; but he knew whom he had believed, and being convinced that his duty called him to persevere, he was not intimidated by a prospect of suffering. At the appointed time he embarked again, the disciples with their families accompanying him to the water-side, where he took leave of them in an affectionate prayer upon the sea-shore^p. He landed next at Ptolemais, a city of Galilee, and staid one day with the brethren there. The next day he proceeded to Cæsarea, and lodged at the house of Philip the deacon, who had four daughters endued with the spirit of prophecy.

During his stay at Cæsarea, a prophet named Agabus came down from Jerusalem, and, agreeable

^o Ver. 4. *Ανευροίτες τους μαθητάς* might be rendered, *Finding out the disciples*. There seems no reason for suppressing the article, and the verb is used for finding out, in consequence of some description or enquiry, Luke 2. 16. We readily suppose, from the Apostle's character, that his first enquiry upon coming to any place where the gospel had been preached, related to those who loved the Lord Jesus, and how they were to be met with. ^p Could many persons now living have seen this, without doubt they would have said, They had seen a strange company of enthusiasts and fanatics.

agreeable to the manner of the ancient prophets, who frequently enforced their declarations by expressive signs and actions, he bound his own hands and feet with the apostle's girdle, assuring them, in the name of the Holy Spirit, that in the same manner the Jews would bind the hands and feet of the man to whom that girdle belonged, and deliver him up as a criminal to the Roman power. Upon these repeated premonitions of what he was to expect, not only the disciples of Cæsarea, but those who had come with him, earnestly entreated him to desist from his purpose. We may learn from this passage, that the clearest intelligence of approaching danger is not always a sufficient warrant to decline it, even when, in the judgment of our brethren, we might decline it without sin. St. Paul was satisfied that, all circumstances considered, it was right for him to proceed; he had taken his determination upon good grounds, was brought so far on his way in safety, and to be told (tho' from an infallible authority) that his views of service could not be completed without great risk and trouble to himself, did not discourage him in the least: he was less affected by the prospect of sufferings from the Jews than by the solicitations of his friends, and told them, that, tho' they could not shake his resolution, their concern and importunity exceedingly distressed him. What mean you to weep, and to break my heart? I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die, for the sake of

the Lord Jesus. In this short speech we may discern a spirit, which is indeed the honour of human nature. Inflexibly firm to his character and duty, yet expressing the most tender feelings for his friends, while he contemplated the severest trials that might affect *himself* unmoved, he was almost overpowered by what he *felt* for *others*. But when they saw that he was not to be dissuaded, they desisted from their suit, and acquiesced in the will of the Lord.

A. D. 60.] Having staid some time at Cæsarea, he proceeded to Jerusalem; his friends, who had crossed the sea with him, resolving to expose themselves to a share of the dangers from which they could not divert him. They were accompanied likewise by an old disciple, named Mnason, of Cyprus, who resided at Jerusalem, and had offered his house for their accommodation. Their arrival was welcome to the brethren, and the next day St. Paul introduced his friends to St. James and the elders, who seem to have met together on purpose to receive him. To them he gave a succinct account of the success with which God had honoured his ministry among the Gentiles: which when they had heard, they unanimously glorified God on his behalf, and rejoiced to hear of the accession of such numbers to the Christian faith⁹. But at the same time they gave him to understand, that the bulk of the Jewish converts had received no small preju-
dice

⁹ Acts, chap. 21.

dice against him; that there were even many thousands who had heard and believed hard things of him, as one who taught the Jews to apostatize from the law of Moses, and forbid them to practice circumcision and the other rites and customs of their forefathers. In order to shew them that this charge was groundless, they advised him to join himself publicly with four men, who were under a vow, and to attend with them the prescribed course of purification in the temple.

From this passage we are led to remark, that, thro' the weakness of human nature, the prejudices of education, and the arts of Satan, many thousands of professed Christians, in the first and purest period of the primitive church, while under the care of the apostles, had imbibed, from hear-say, a degree of coldness and dislike towards one of the Lord's most faithful and most favoured servants. How far the method St. Paul was advised to pursue, for the removal of this misapprehension, was suited to his character and known integrity, is a question not easily determined. The apostles, considered in one light, as the penmen of a large part of the sacred canon of faith and practice, which the Lord was pleased by them to communicate to his church, were doubtless, so far, under the full direction and inspiration of his Holy Spirit; but we have no reason to believe that, in every part of their own personal conduct, they were strictly infallible : nay, we have

good warrant to conclude the contrary, as St. Paul himself assures us, that, upon a certain occasion (already mentioned) he withstood Peter to his face, because he was to be blamed. It is therefore no way derogatory from the character and authority of St. Paul, to enquire, whether, upon this occasion, the tenderness of his spirit towards weak believers, and his desire of becoming all things to all men (when the foundation-truths of the gospel were not affected) might not carry him too far; for tho' a reserve was made by James, in favour of the Gentile converts, that they should not be burthened with the observance of Jewish rites, yet the express end and design for which this step was proposed to him, and for which he seems to have undertaken it, was, that all might know or believe, not only that he was not against others adhering to the Jewish ceremonies, but that he likewise orderly and stately practised them himself: a circumstance which is far from being clear, or indeed probable, if we consider the strain of his epistle to the Galatians, which, tho' the addition at the close of our copies mentions as sent from Rome, is generally allowed to have been written during his stay at Ephesus at the latest, if not sooner; and further, that for some time past his converse had been almost wholly confined to the Gentile believers, or to those churches of which they formed the largest part. If he became as a Jew amongst the
Jews,

Jews, it was (as he says himself) only with the hope of gaining^r the Jews ; which motive could no longer take place when he had finally withdrawn from their synagogues. Those therefore who suppose that, in this instance, he was over-persuaded to deviate from that openness of conduct which he generally maintained, seem to have some ground for their suspicion ; this however is certain, his temporizing did not answer the proposed end, but instead of rendering him more acceptable, involved him in the greatest danger : for when the seven days were almost fulfilled, some Jews of Asia, seeing him in the temple, pointed him out to the multitude as the dangerous man who had apostatized from his religion, and was using his endeavours, wherever he went, to draw people from the worship of God according to the law of Moses. To this they added, that he had profaned the holy place, by bringing Gentiles with him into the temple. This they conjectured from having seen Trophymus, an Ephesian, with him in the city. This part of the charge was wholly false ; he had not brought his Gentile friends into the temple, but he appeared so publicly with them upon other occasions, as to give some room for a surmise of this sort : if he submitted to the proposal of the elders, and attended in the temple himself, for the satisfaction of the Jewish converts, he would not go so far as to be ashamed of his friends, to

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make

^r 1 Cor. 9. 20.

make himself more acceptable to his enemies. It is our duty to avoid giving just offence, but if we boldly and honestly avow the Lord's people upon all proper occasions, without regard to names and parties, we must expect to suffer from the zealots of all sides.

Those who first laid hands on him were soon assisted by great numbers, for the whole city was moved, and the people ran together from all quarters: they dragged him out of the temple, and were upon the point of killing him, without giving him time or leave to speak a word for himself; they thought him absolutely in their power, but they were prevented by the appearance of Lyfias, a Roman officer, who had a post near the temple, to prevent or suppress insurrections. Upon the first notice he received of this disturbance, he came down with a party of soldiers. The Evangelist observes, that when the Jews ran to kill Paul, the Romans ran to save him. Thus the succour the Lord provides for his people is always proportioned to the case, and effectual to the end. When danger is pressing, relief is speedy. Lyfias, tho' ignorant of the cause of this tumult, judging by its violence that the apostle must have been some great malefactor, commanded him to be bound with two chains, and, when he could obtain no satisfactory information from the people, had him removed to the castle, or Roman station; but such was the violence of the incensed unmeaning multitude, that the soldiers
were

were constrained to carry him in their arms up the steps, or stairs, which led thither from the temple. Here Paul obtained leave to speak for himself, the tribune inclining rather to a more favourable opinion of him, when he found he could speak Greek; and the people attended with some composure, when they heard him address them in the Hebrew or Syriac language.

In his discourse * he told them, that he had been brought up amongst themselves, and appealing to the high-priest and elders concerning the zeal and earnestness with which he had formerly served their party, he related the extraordinary dispensation by which the Lord Jesus had conquered his heart. This was St. Paul's usual method of defence, and tho' no means are sufficient to reach the heart without a divine influence, yet, humanly speaking, a simple and faithful declaration of what God has done for our souls, seems most likely to convince, or at least to soften and silence, those who oppose. Enraged as the Jews had been, they listened with patience to his relation till he proceeded to intimate the Lord's designs in favour of the Gentiles, and that he was appointed an apostle to them. Accustomed to despise the rest of mankind, and to deem themselves the only people of God, they could not bear this; they interrupted him instantly, and, with one voice, declared it was not fit such a fellow should live upon

upon the earth : they cast off their clothes, threw dust in the air, and their fury seemed to deprive them of their reason. Lyſias, the tribune, ſecured him from their violence, but commanded him to be examined by ſcourging, that he might know his crime from his own mouth, according to a barbarous cuſtom of putting thoſe to torture againſt whom there was no ſufficient evidence, that their own extorted confeſſion might furniſh ſome grounds of proceeding againſt them : a cuſtom ſtill prevalent in moſt countries called Chriſtian, tho' contrary to religion, to reaſon, and to the common ſentiments of humanity. Our Lord Jeſus was examined in this manner before Pilate, and tho' the apoſtle was ready to follow the ſteps of his maſter in ſuffering, yet, upon this occaſion, he pleaded his right of exemption from ſuch treatment, as being a native of Tarſus, a city honoured with the freedom of Rome. A Roman citizen was not legally liable either to be bound or ſcourged : therefore, when the tribune underſtood his privilege, he ſtopped farther proceedings, and was ſomething apprehenſive for himſelf, that he had in part violated them already, by ordering him to be bound^t; but being ſtill deſirous to know what was laid to his charge, he convened the chief prieſts and the members of the ſanhedrim on
the

^t A Roman citizen might be bound with a chain, but not tied with thongs or beaten with rods. *Facinus eſt vinciri civem Romanum, ſcelus verberari.* CICERO.

the next day, and brought him again before them.

The apostle, fixing his eyes upon the high-priest and council, as one who was neither ashamed or afraid^u to appear at their tribunal, began with a declaration, that he had lived to that day in the exercise of a good conscience: but Ananias, the high-priest, forgetting his character as a judge, commanded those who stood near to strike him on the face. The apostle severely rebuked his partiality, in perverting the cause of justice, and *warned* him of the righteous judgment of God, the supreme Judge, who would surely punish his hypocrisy^v. His reply to those who reproved him for speaking in such terms to the high-priest, seems to intimate, that the injurious treatment he had received had raised an undue warmth in his spirit, tho' it may be supposed that he denounced his future doom under a superior and prophetic impulse; but knowing that the council was composed of Pharisees and Sadducees, who were at variance amongst themselves about several weighty points, particularly the Doctrine of a Resurrection, he declared himself a Pharisee, and that the opposition he met with from the Sadducees was owing to his belief and hope in that Doctrine. The
Pharisees

^u Acts 23.

^v Thou whited wall!—A clay-wall, glossed over with white, is an apt emblem of a man who carries on a malicious design under the pretence and forms of justice. Hatred is the character, and dreadfully dangerous the condition of such,

Pharisees immediately suspended their present resentment, to embrace the occasion offered of opposing their old antagonists, and upon this issue espoused his cause, declaring him innocent; and said, that if a spirit or angel (the existence of both which the Sadducees denied) had spoken to him, they ought not to fight against God, by refusing to hear him. Upon this a great dissension took place, and Lyfias, fearing that Paul would be torn in pieces between the contending parties, put an end to the conference, and ordered the soldiers to take him by force and secure him in the castle. It is indeed often well for believers, that the people of the world, tho' agreed in one point, namely, To oppose the gospel, are divided and subdivided in other respects, so that, for the sake of a favourite passion, or to cross an opposite interest, they will sometimes protect those whom they would otherwise willingly destroy.

The next night he received full amends for all he had suffered, and was confirmed against the utmost efforts of his enemies malice; for the Lord Jesus, whom he served, vouchsafed to appear to him in a vision, commanded him to be of good cheer, owned his gracious acceptance of his late testimony in Jerusalem, and promised that none should hinder him the honour of bearing witness to his truth at Rome likewise. The world has been sometimes surprized at the confidence which the faithful servants of Christ have shewn in the midst of dangers

importing his care to preserve the prisoner, because he understood him to be a Roman citizen, and that he had commanded his accusers to follow. Thus the conspiracy, which his enemies had formed to destroy him, proved the occasion of his deliverance out of their hands.

In about five days afterwards, Ananias the high-priest, with the elders of the council, appeared * before Fœlix, against Paul. The charge was opened by Tertullus, a venal orator, or advocate, whom they had retained for this purpose, who began with a commendation of the governor, in terms which might have suited the illustrious actions and wise measures of princes studious of the public good, but were ill-applied to Fœlix (who was infamous for his cruelty and oppression) and in the name of the Jews who hated him. But enmity to the gospel will make men stoop to the meanest flattery and servility, if, by that means, they have hope of gaining their point! The sum of the accusation was, that Paul was an enemy to church and state, a disturber of the established religion, and a mover of sedition against the government; to which was added, as a popular proof of the charge, that he was a ringleader of the sect or heresy of the Nazarenes, so called from Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, by a former governor, for asserting himself to be a king. Thus much seems implied in the term Nazarene, as the
Jews

* Acts, chap. 24.

Jews used it. The apostle began his defence with a protestation of his innocence, as to any design of moving sedition or tumult, which he said his enemies were unable to prove by a single fact: he proceeded to inform the governor of the true motives of their enmity against him, and acknowledged that he worshipped God in a way which they stigmatized with the name of heresy or division; for the proper ^y meaning of heresy is no more than sect or party. By farther declaring that he worshipped the God of his fathers, and believed all things written in the law and the prophets, he proved, from the object and the manner of his worship, that he was not guilty of any blameable innovations: he professed the hope of a resurrection, which his enemies could not but allow, and that it was his constant study ^z and endeavour to maintain a conscience

^y As the apostle only cautions Titus to reject or avoid a heretic (Tit. 3. 10.) but has not defined him expressly, many writers and teachers have had a fair field to exercise their skill or their passions upon the subject, yet the question is far from determined to this day. Some would treat all those as heretics, who differ from them either in judgment or practice; others explain the word quite away, as tho' the admonition to avoid a heretic was wholly unnecessary. Perhaps the advice to Titus is nearly, if not exactly, equivalent to Rom. 16. 17. The spirit of truth produces unity; the spirit of division is heresy. And the man who fiercely stickles for opinions of his own, who acts contrary to the peaceable, forbearing, humble spirit of the gospel, who affects to form a party and to be thought considerable in it, is so far a heretic.

^z Acts 24, 16. The Greek word here used (*αὐσια*) denotes the study, diligence and proficiency

science void of offence; and added, that it was not he, but the Jews themselves, who had raised the tumult, by assailing him when he was peaceably attending in the temple, according to the prescribed rules. He observed that his first accusers were not present, as they ought to have been; and challenged any, who were within hearing, to prove their allegations in any one instance.

Fœlix having, perhaps, a favourable opinion of the christian profession, which had been settled some time at Cæsarea, and being likewise desirous of farther information, deferred the full discussion of the affair till the arrival of Lyfias: and committed Paul, in the mean time, to the care of a centurion, as a prisoner at large, allowing him to go abroad in the city, and giving his friends liberty to visit him at home. And thus he was providentially delivered from the blood-thirsty Jews, and found an asylum in the Roman power, which they had endeavoured to engage for his destruction.

He

ciency of a person who is desirous to excel and be eminent in any particular art: as a painter for instance; he searches out the best masters and the best pieces, he studies and copies the beauties of others works, and is continually retouching and improving upon his own; his acquaintance reflections and recreations are all accommodated to his main purpose, and tho' his pencil is sometimes at rest, his imagination is seldom idle. Similar to this is the exercise of a good conscience, formed upon the model of the scripture, and improved by diligence, meditation, examination and experience.

A. D. 59.] He was sent for, not long after, by Fœlix, and discoursed before him and his wife Drusilla concerning the faith of Christ. Curiosity was the governor's motive; but the apostle, who knew his character, was faithful to him, and would not speak of the faith of Christ only, to one who could not understand it, but made a home application, by enlarging on righteousness, temperance, and the important consequences of a future judgment. These were fit topics to press upon an unjust and rapacious governor, who lived in adultery, Drusilla (his reputed wife) having forsaken a lawful husband to live with him. She was by birth a Jewess, daughter of the Herod whose death we have already mentioned, and having renounced her religion and her husband for Fœlix, was, by the judgment of God, given up to hardness of heart; so that it does not appear that the apostle's discourse made any impression upon her. It was otherwise with Fœlix, who, tho' a wicked man, had sinned against less light: he trembled at what he heard, and, not able to conceal his concern, he cut short the interview, with a promise to send for him again at a convenient season. So great sometimes is the power of truth, when faithfully enforced! With this only advantage on his side, Paul the prisoner triumphs over a haughty governor, and makes him tremble. Great likewise is the power of sin! Fœlix trembled at the review of the past and the prospect of the future, but he could

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not stop; he found some avocation for his present relief, and put off his most important concerns to a fitter opportunity, which it is probable never came. He saw and heard Paul afterwards, but the same man had no more the same influence, the accompanying force of the spirit was withheld, and then he had no farther view in conversing with him, but the hope of receiving money for his enlargement. When the apostle had continued in this situation about two years, Fœlix was recalled from his government: he had governed the Jews with severity and injustice, and had reason to fear they would accuse him to the emperor; therefore, to ingratiate himself with them, he left Paul in his confinement, thinking that the detention of the person they hated might make them more readily excuse what was past; or at least he durst not provoke them farther, by releasing him.

A. D. 60.] When Festus, who succeeded Fœlix in the government, went up to Jerusalem^a, the high-priest and elders applied to him, and requested that Paul might be sent thither to be tried before the council; and they appointed proper instruments to assault and murder him in the journey. It seems they expected this favour would be easily granted, as it is usual for governors, at their first coming amongst a people, to do some popular act; but Festus refused, and commanded them to follow him to Cæsarea, where

where he himself would judge in the cause. The Jews accordingly exerted themselves in one more effort, and, when Festus was returned to Cæsarea, presented themselves before him on an appointed day, and Paul being brought into the court, they accused him heavily, as they had done before, and to as little effect, not being able to prove any thing against him, or to invalidate his protestation that he had committed no offence, either against the law, or the temple, or the Roman government. Festus, who had refused to send him to Jerusalem before, was now willing to oblige them, perceiving the controversy was of a religious kind, and what he had little knowledge of: he therefore asked Paul, if he was willing to be tried, in his presence, before the council at Jerusalem. The apostle, who knew what treatment he might expect from the Jews, answered, that he was then at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where he ought to be tried, and that, if found guilty, he was not unwilling to suffer; but that, against the proposal of being delivered up to those who thirsted for his blood, he appealed to Cæsar. This was one privilege of a Roman citizen, that, when he thought himself aggrieved in an inferior court, he might, by entering such an appeal, put a stop to proceedings, and refer the cause to the immediate determination of the emperor. From the example of St. Paul, who counted not his life dear, but was willing, not only to be bound, but to die for the Lord

Jesus, we learn, that it is very allowable for a Christian to avail himself of the laws and privileges of his country, when unjustly persecuted for righteousness-sake ; and perhaps, in some cases, it would be blameable to omit it. Civil liberty is a *depositum* with which we are entrusted for posterity, and, by all lawful means, should be carefully preserved. Festus, after having consulted with his council and lawyers upon this unexpected turn, admitted the appeal, and determined he should be sent to Rome. Paul had long had a desire to visit the believers in that city, and had formed some plans concerning it. But it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. His way was now opened in a manner he had not thought of, but in such a manner as made it more evident, that his bonds proved to the furtherance of the gospel.

Soon after this, Agrippa, son of the late Herod, who had large territories, and the title of king, under the Romans, came, with his sister Bernice, to congratulate Festus upon his accession to his government : he was a man of a fair character, a professed Jew, but possessed of moderation and prudence. During their stay, Festus informed them of what had lately happened concerning Paul. The whole that he understood of the affair was, that he had not been guilty of any crime, but that his accusers had certain questions against him of their own superstitions, and concerning one Jesus, who was dead, and whom Paul affirmed to

to be alive. To him, the life and the death of Jesus were points of equal indifference: Not so to those who believe; he died for them, and who expect that, because he lives, they shall live also. This imperfect account made Agrippa desirous to hear Paul himself, and accordingly, the next day, Agrippa, Bernice and Festus, being seated in ^b court, attended by their officers and train, and a number of the principal people, Paul was once more brought forth ^c to speak in public for himself. On this occasion he addressed himself particularly to Agrippa, and having expressed his satisfaction that he was permitted to speak before one who was so well acquainted with the laws and customs of the Jews, he related the cause of his present confinement; he professed his faith and hope in the scriptures, and then, as he had done before, he gave him an account of the extraordinary means by which he had been changed from a ^d persecutor to a follower of Jesus, in his journey to Damascus: his defence therefore (as has been formerly observed)

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was

^b The apology St. Paul made for himself was not his trial; he had already stopped all proceedings at law by his appeal to Cæsar: Nor was Festus then as a judge upon his tribunal. ^c Acts 26. ^d Speaking of his past conduct towards the disciples, he calls it *madness--being exceedingly*, or (as we express it) *raging mad against them*. A man in this state will assault any person he meets, he waits for no provocation, listens to no entreaty, regards no consequences: Thus the apostle judged of himself when a persecutor of the church; and the spirit of persecution in every age has been the same. May God restore those to their right minds who are governed by it.

was rather experimental than argumentative, and made very different impressions upon his hearers. Festus, who seems to have had a good opinion of his sincerity and intention, yet, supposing no man in his sober senses could believe such a strange story, interrupted him in his narration, and with an air, rather of piety than indignation, said, Paul, thou art beside thyself! much learning hath made thee mad*. A similar judgment is passed by too many upon all who profess an acquaintance with the life of faith in an unseen Jesus; but ordinarily, now, the effect is not ascribed to the excess of learning, but to the want of it; as, on the other hand, a man who maintains the wildest absurdities, puts his judgment and understanding to little hazard in the world's esteem, if his chimæras are set off with a competent apparatus of literature. Agrippa however was differently affected, especially when Paul made a bold appeal to himself, concerning the notoriety of the facts which had lately happened, and the truth of the prophecies with which they were connected. Here the power of truth triumphed again, and Agrippa was so struck, that, without regarding the numerous assembly, or the displeasure such a decla-

* His answer to Festus is expressed with much accuracy and precision. I am not mad, most noble Festus! but speak forth (*αποφθγγομαι*) the words of truth and soberness. Madness discovers itself either in the apprehension of a false object, or in the false apprehension of a true one. The things he spoke of were true in themselves, and his ideas of them just and proportionate,

declaration might give both to Jews and Romans, particularly to Festus, who had expressed his sentiment just before, he gave way to the emotions of his mind, and said aloud, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. Yet this was but an involuntary conviction; it did honour to the apostle, but was of no benefit to himself. And the concession which, at first view, seems to proceed from an ingenuous spirit, when closely examined, amounts but to this, that tho' Agrippa was, indeed, convinced of the truth, his heart was so attached to the present evil world, that he had neither courage nor will to follow it; as when we say of a picture, It looks almost alive, we do not mean, strictly, that there is any more life in the painting, than in the canvass on which it is drawn, but only that the resemblance is strong: So the almost Christian, however specious in his professions, is still destitute of that living principle which alone can enable him to make them good, and is, in reality, an utter stranger to true Christianity. In the graceful return the apostle made to the king's acknowledgment, he hinted at this defect, wishing that both Agrippa, and all who heard him, were not only almost, but altogether, as he was himself, with an exception to the chains he wore for the cause of the gospel. This answer discovers, in one view, the confidence he had in his cause, the happy frame of his mind, the engaging turn of his address, and his unbounded benevolence: he

could wish nothing better, than what he himself felt, to his dearest friends, and he wished nothing worse to his greatest enemies; nay, he wished that his enemies might, if possible, experience all his comforts, without any of his trials. When Festus and Agrippa were withdrawn, they agreed, in their opinion, that he had done nothing deserving of death, or even of imprisonment, and that he might have been released, if he had not himself prevented^f it, by appealing to Cæsar.

In consequence of the determination to send him to Rome, he was committed to the custody of a centurion named Julius, with whom he embarked in a vessel that was on a trading voyage to several parts of the Lesser Asia. Aristarchus and some other of his friends went with him, and particularly the evangelist Luke, who seems to have been the inseparable companion of his travels, from the first time he was at Troas. They touched the following day at Sidon, where the centurion gave him liberty to refresh himself, and visit his friends. At their next port, Myra in Lycia, a vessel offering which was bound directly for Italy, they went on board her. In the beginning of this passage they were retarded by contrary winds. At length they reached the island of Crete (now called Candia) and having put into a port, called the Fair-Havens, Paul would have persuaded them to have staid there, intimating that, as the winter was now advancing,

^f Acts, ch. 27.

advancing, they would meet with many inconveniences and dangers, if they ventured to proceed any farther. Long voyages were seldom attempted, during the winter, in those days, or for many ages after, till the knowledge of the compass made way for those great improvements in navigation which now embolden the mariner to sail, indifferently, at any season of the year. But it is probable the apostle's precaution was not merely founded upon the obvious disadvantages of the season, but rather upon an extraordinary pre-intimation of what was soon to happen. But his remonstrance was over-ruled, the centurion preferring the judgment of the master of the ship, who thought it best, if possible, to reach another haven at the west end of the island, which was thought to be more commodious and safe than the place Paul proposed. A favourable wind springing up from the south, determined their resolves, and they set sail with a good confidence of soon reaching their desired port.

There is little doubt but Paul's case and character had, by this time, engaged the notice of many of his fellow-passengers in the ship. Upon a superficial enquiry they would learn, that he was the follower of one Jesus, who had been crucified; that he was esteemed a setter forth of strange Gods, and charged with having disturbed the public peace wherever he came. He probably took frequent occasions to speak of his Lord and Master to those about him, and as he had several companions, the
manner

manner of their social worship could hardly pass unobserved ; but no emergency had, as yet, occurred to manifest the solidity and force of his principles to full advantage, and to make it evident to all with whom he failed, that his God was far unlike the idols of the heathens, and that the religion which prompted him to do and suffer so much for the sake of Jesus, was founded, not in the imaginations and inventions of men, but in reality and truth. In prosperous circumstances, most people are easily satisfied with their own principles, and are ready to take it for granted, that even the notions received from no better source than tradition or custom, cannot be wrong, or at least will not be dangerous ; but it is in a season of common distress that the truth and efficacy of vital religion appear with the most incontestible authority. The God who alone can deliver when all hope of safety is taken away, and the religion which can inspire a man with confidence and peace, when there is nothing but dismay and confusion around him, will then extort some acknowledgment, even from those who had before thought of them with indifference. From these considerations we may collect one general reason why the Lord, who, by his divine providence adjusts the time and circumstances of every event, and without whose permission not a sparrow can fall to the ground, permits his faithful people to be so often exercised with severe trials : it is, to manifest that their
hopes

hopes are well grounded, that they have not taken up with words and notions, but have a real and sure support, and can hope and rejoice in God under those pressures which deprive others of all their patience and all their courage; and, on the other hand, to evince that his power and faithfulness are surely engaged on their behalf, that he puts an honour upon their prayers, is near to help them in the time of trouble, and can deliver them out of their greatest extremities. We are not then to wonder that this favoured servant of the Lord, after having endured so many sufferings and hardships upon the land, was exposed, in the course of this voyage, to equal dangers and difficulties upon the sea; for they had not long quitted their last port before their hopes of gaining a better were blasted: they were overtaken by a sudden and violent storm. The name given it by the historian, *Euroclydon*, expresses its direction to have been from the eastern quarter, and its energy upon the waves. The tempest irresistibly overpowered the mariners, and rendered their art impracticable and vain: they were compelled to abandon the ship to the direction of the wind, and were hurried away they knew not where. Mention is made of the difficulty they had to secure the ship's boat, as the only probable means of escaping if they should be wrecked, which yet, in the event, was wholly useless to them: likewise of their endeavours to strengthen the

the ship by girding her with ropes, and of their throwing a considerable part of the lading and tackling into the sea. In this distressed situation, expecting every hour to be either swallowed up by the waves, or dashed to pieces against unknown rocks or shores, they continued fourteen days. When they were almost worn out with hardship and anxiety, and there was no human probability of deliverance, the Lord manifested the care he had of his servants. The seamen had not seen sun or stars for many days, but his eye had been upon Paul and his companions every moment. No one on board could even conjecture into what part of the sea the ship was driven, but the Lord knew, and his angels knew, and now one was commanded to appear, to comfort the apostle, and to give him a word of comfort for all on board. Upon this, he addressed the people in the ship, exhorting them to take some food, and to be of good courage; for that the God to whom he belonged, and whom he served, had given him assurance, by an angel, not only of his own safety, but that the lives of all on board should be preserved for his sake; that the ship would be cast upon a certain island, but he fully relied on the promise, that not one of them should be lost: he had been told that he must stand before Cæsar, which was a sufficient earnest of his preservation; For who, or what, can disappoint the purpose of God? Amidst all these threatening appearances, Paul was, in
reality,

reality, as safe in the storm as Cæsar could be thought upon the throne. And thus all his servants are inviolably preserved by his watchful providence, so that neither elements nor enemies can hurt them, till the work he has appointed them is accomplished.

At length the seamen perceived indications that they were drawing near to land; and when they were driven into a convenient depth of water, they cast anchor, and waited for the approach of day. In this interval the people were encouraged, by Paul's advice and example, to eat a hearty meal, by which their strength and spirits were recruited to sustain the fatigue they were yet to undergo. In the morning they saw an island, but knew it not. The mariners, regarding their own safety only, were about to make their escape in the boat; but Paul informing the soldiers that they could not be saved unless the seamen remained in the ship, they paid so much regard to his judgment as immediately to cut the ropes by which the boat was fastened, and give her up to the sea.

Their only remaining resource was to force the ship upon the shore, in a place where landing would be most practicable, and of this the mariners were the most proper judges. If this island (as is generally supposed) was that which we now call Malta, we know that it is almost environed with rocks. They having therefore discovered an open bay, with a beach

of sand or pebbles², endeavoured to run the ship there; but had the management of this business been left to the soldiers and passengers, who were unexperienced in sea affairs, they might probably have let her drive at random against the rocks, where an escape would (humanly speaking) have been impossible. In this view we may observe, that the apostle's firm confidence in the promise he had received was connected with a prudent attention to the means in their power, from which the promise received was so far from dispensing them, that it was their chief encouragement to be diligent in employing them. This incident may be applied to points of more general importance, and, if carefully attended to, might have determined or prevented many unnecessary and perplexing disputes concerning the divine decrees, and their influence on the contingencies of human life. What God has appointed shall surely come to pass, but in such a manner, that all the means and secondary causes, by which he has determined to fulfil his designs, shall have their proper place and subserviency. Accordingly they made the best of their way
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² *They discovered a certain creek, with a shore.* But there was a shore all round the island. *Αιγιαλος* does not express the sea-coast in general, or a rocky craggy shore, but the skirts of an open bay, convenient for launching, landing, or drawing a net for fish. See Matt. 13. 2, 48. John 21. 4. A mariner who understood Greek would, perhaps, render the sentence thus—*They observed a certain bay, with a beach.* And this they chose as the most likely place to get safe to land.

to the shore ; but before they quite reached it, the ship was stopped by a point or bank^h, where her fore-part stuck fast, and remained immoveable, but the stern, or hinder part, was presently broken by the violence of the surges. In the general confusion, the soldiers, unmindful how much they were indebted to Paul, proposed that all the prisoners should be killed without distinction, lest they should be accountable if any of them escaped ; but the centurion, who interested himself in his preservation, rejected the motion, and commanded every one to do what they could for their own safety. Many, who could swim, cast themselves into the sea ; the rest availed themselves of planks and broken pieces of the ship, and the merciful providence of the Lord gave their endeavours success, so that the whole company, consisting of two hundred and seventy-six persons, came safe to land.

The inhabitants, tho' called Barbarians, received and accommodated them with great humanity, and manifested a tenderneſs, too rarely found, upon such occasions, amongst those who bear the name of Christians ; they brought them under cover, and kindled fires to warm and dry them. The apostle, who cheerfully suited himself to all circumstances, assisted in supplying the fire with fuel ; but
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^h Τοῦτο διβαλλασσα is rendered, in our version, A place where two seas met, but there is nothing answerable to the word *met* ; probably it means what the mariners call a spit or point of sand running off from the shore, and which had had a sufficient depth of water on either side.

having gathered a parcel of sticks, a viper, which was unperceived in the midst of them, fastened itself upon his hand: he had just escaped from storm and shipwreck, and was exposed to as great a danger of another kind. Such is the nature of our present state, and it is a proof of our pride and ignorance, that we are seldom greatly apprehensive for ourselves, but when some formidable appearance is before our eyes. A tempest, pestilence, or earthquake alarms us, and not without reason; but, alas! we are not such mighty creatures as to have nothing to fear but from such powerful agents: a tile, a fly, a hair, or a grain of sand, are sufficient instruments, in the hand of God, to remove a king from the throne to the grave, or to cut off the conqueror at the head of his victorious armies. On the other hand, those who serve the Lord, and trust in him, are equally safe under all events; neither storms, nor flood, nor flames, nor the many unthought-of evils which lurk around in the smoothest scenes of life, have permission to hurt them till their race is finished, and then it little signifies by what means they are removed into their master's joy. The apostle, in the strength of divine faith, shook off the venomous creature into the fire, and remained unmoved and unhurt. The islanders, who saw what had past, judged at first (from those faint apprehensions of a superior power inflicting punishment on the wicked, which seem to remain in the darkest and most ignorant nations) that he
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was certainly a murtherer, who, tho' he had escaped the seas, was pursued by vengeance, and marked out for destruction; but when, after expecting for some time to see him drop down dead, they found that he had received no harm, they retracted their censure, and conceived him to be a god, or something more than man. This event probably prepared them to hear him with attention.

The apostle and his friends were courteously entertained three days by Publius, the chief person of the island, who resided near the place of their landing: he requited the kindness of his host, by restoring to health his father, who had been some time ill of a fever and dysentery. In the same manner he laid his hands on many sick persons, who were healed in answer to his prayers. These acceptable services procured him much favour from the inhabitants, and when, after three months stay, he was about to depart, they furnished him liberally with necessary provisions for his voyage.

A. D. 61.] They sailed from thence in a ship of Alexandria that had wintered in the island, and stopping three days at Syracuse in Sicily, soon after arrived at Rhegium, and from thence, in two days, at Puteoli, near Naples, where they disembarked, and continued a week, at the request of the christians of the place. From Puteoli to Rome their journey lay about one hundred miles by land.

The disciples at Rome having heard of Paul's approach, several of them met him at a place called Appii Forum, and another party at the Three Taverns; the former place being about fifty, and the other thirty miles from the city. At the sight of these believers, whom he had loved unseen, we are told he thanked God and took courage. Even the apostle Paul, tho' habitually flaming with zeal and love, was not always in the same frame. We learn from his own account of himself, that he had sometimes sharp exercises of mind, and perhaps this was such a time, when his thoughts were much engaged on what awaited him upon his arrival at Rome, and his appearance before the cruel and capricious Nero. The Lord has so constituted his body, the Church, that the different members are needful and helpful to each other, and the stronger are often indebted to the weaker. St. Paul himself was revived and animated at this juncture by the sight of those who were, in every respect, inferior to him: it rejoiced him to see that Christ his Lord was worshipped at Rome also; and being in the presence of those with whom he could open his mind, and freely confer upon the glorious truths that filled his heart, he forgot at once the fatigue he had lately suffered, and the future difficulties he had reason to expect.

Upon their arrival at Rome, the centurion delivered up the prisoners to the proper officer; but Paul had the favour allowed him to live in
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in a house which he hired, under the guard of one soldier. Here he immediately discovered his usual activity of spirit in his Master's cause, and, without losing time, sent on the third day for the principal persons of the Jews (according to his general custom of making the first declarations of the gospel to them) and acquainted them with the cause of his prosecution and appeal: he assured them that he had no intention, in vindicating himself, to lay any thing to the charge of his own people; adding, that, not for any singularities of his own, or for any offence against the law of Moses, but for the hope of Israel, he was bound withⁱ the chain he then wore. They answered, that they had received no information concerning him from Judea, but that they understood the sect to which he professed an attachment was every where spoken against: they therefore desired to hear his sentiments, and appointed a day for the purpose, when many of them came to him, and he spent the whole day, from morning till evening, in proving, confirming and explaining the nature and necessity of the gospel and kingdom of Christ, from the books of Moses and the prophets. His discourse had good effect upon some, but others believed not, and they de-

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parted

ⁱ Among the Romans, the prisoner was always chained to the soldier or soldiers who guarded him. St. Paul speaks of his chain, both to friends and enemies, with an indifference that shews how well content he was to wear it for his Master's sake. See Ephes. 6. 20. 2 Tim. 1. 16.

parted with considerable disagreement among themselves; the apostle taking leave of them with that solemn warning, which our Lord had often used in the course of his ministry, from the prophecy of Isaiah^k, denouncing incurable and judicial blindness and hardness of heart upon those who wilfully rejected the proposal of the truth.

He remained a prisoner in his own hired house for the space of two years, having an unrestrained liberty to receive all who came to him, and to preach the glad tidings of salvation by Christ; which, we learn from his epistles^l, he did with so much success, that his imprisonment evidently contributed to the furtherance of the gospel, enlarged the number of believers, and animated the zeal and confidence of those who had already received faith and grace.

A. D. 63.] The history of St. Luke ends here, which I have followed more closely than I at first designed, partly because the facts he has recorded suggest many reflections which have, more or less, a reference to our main design, and partly from a reluctance to leave the only sure and incontestible history by which our researches into the establishment and state of the primitive church can be guided; for tho' some monuments of the early ages of christianity, which are still extant, have a great share of merit, and will afford us materials to make good our plan, yet they must be selected

^k Isa. 6. 9, 10.

^l Philip 1. 12.

selected with caution, for it would be a want of ingenuouſness not to acknowledge that there are great mixtures and blemishes to be found in the writings of those who lived nearest to the apostles times: and in the most ancient historical remains several things have a place, which shew that a spirit of credulity and superstition had very early and extensive influence; the evident traces of which have given too fair an occasion to some persons, of more learning than candour, to attempt to bring the whole of those records into disrepute. But where the characteristic genius and native tendency of the gospel are rightly understood, and carefully attended to, a mind, not under the power of bias and prejudice, will be furnished with sufficient *data*, whereby to distinguish what is genuine and worthy of credit, from the spurious and uncertain additions which have been incautiously received.

I shall be brief in deducing our history from this period to the close of the first century. St. Paul, after more than two years confinement at Rome, having not yet finished his appointed measure of service, was providentially preserved from the designs of all his enemies, and set at liberty. We are told by some, that, in pursuance of the design he had long before expressed, he went into Spain, and from thence to Gaul, now called France: nor have endeavours been wanting to prove that he preached the gospel even in the British isles. That he, at some time, accomplished his de-

fire of visiting Spain, is not improbable, but we have no certain evidence that he did so: Much less is there any ground for supposing that he was either in France or Britain. From his own writings, however, we have good reason to believe, that, upon his dismissal from Rome, he revisited the churches of Syria, and some other parts of Asia; for, in his epistle to the Hebrews, he mentions his purpose of seeing *them*, in company with his beloved Timothy; and writing to Philemon, who lived at Colosse, he requests him to prepare him a lodging, for that he hoped to be with him shortly. And it was probably in this progress that he preached in Crete, and committed the churches he gathered there to the care of Titus; for we have no account in the Acts of his having visited that island before, except the little time he touched there in his passage to Rome, which seems not to have been sufficient for so great a work. How he was employed afterwards we know not, but it is generally agreed, that, towards the latter part of Nero's reign, he returned to Rome, and there received the crown of martyrdom.

In the accounts preserved of the rest of the apostles, we likewise meet with great uncertainty, nor can any thing be determined to satisfaction, concerning either the seat of their labours, or the time or manner of their deaths. I shall therefore wave a particular detail of what is not supported by sufficient proof. I only observe, concerning St. Peter, that the
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assertion of his having been bishop of Rome, on which (and not on the true rock) the whole system of the papacy is built, is not only inconsistent with what is recorded of him in the Acts, and the silence of St. Paul concerning him, in the epistles he wrote from thence—but is so far without foundation in ecclesiastical history, that it still remains a point of dubious controversy, whether he ever saw Rome in his life: if he did, it was probably towards the close of it; and the most received opinion is, that he suffered martyrdom there at the same time with St. Paul; that Peter was crucified, and that Paul had the favour of being beheaded, in consideration that he was a Roman citizen.

The Christians, tho' generally despised, and often insulted for their profession, had not hitherto been subject to a direct and capital persecution; but Nero, who, intoxicated with power, had in a few years arrived at a pitch of wickedness and cruelty till then unheard-of, at length directed his rage against the servants of Christ,

A. D. 64.] In his tenth year the city of Rome was set on fire, and a very considerable part of it consumed. This calamity was generally imputed to him, as the author, and it seems not without justice. Mischief and the misery of others were the study of his life, and he is reported to have expressed great pleasure at the spectacle, and to have sung the burning of Troy while Rome was in flames. Tho' he afterwards did many popular things, and spared

no expence in relieving the people, and rebuilding the city, he could not clear himself from the suspicion of the fact, any otherwise than by charging it upon the Christians. The heathen historian Tacitus, in his account of this event, enables us so well to judge of the character which the Christians bore in his time, that I shall subjoin a translation of it for the information of the unlearned.

“ But neither the emperor’s donations, nor the atonements offered to the gods, could remove the scandal of this report, but it was still believed that the city had been burnt by his instigation. Nero therefore, to put a stop to the rumour, charged the fact, and inflicted the severest punishments for it, upon the Christians, as they were commonly called, A people detestable for their crimes. The author of this sect was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death by Pontius Pilate. The destructive superstition which was by this means suppressed for the present, soon broke out again, and not only overspread Judea, where it first arose, but reached even to Rome, where all abominations, from every quarter, are sure to meet, and to find acceptance. Some who confessed themselves Christians were first apprehended, and a vast multitude afterwards upon their impeachment, who were condemned, not so much for burning the city, as for being the objects of universal hatred. Their sufferings and torments were heightened by mockery and derision. Some were inclosed
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in the skins of wild beasts, that they might be torn in pieces by dogs, others were crucified, and others, being covered with inflammable matter, were lighted up as torches at the close of day. These spectacles were exhibited in Nero's gardens, where he held a kind of Circensian shew, either mixing with the populace in the habit of a charioteer, or himself contending in the race. Hence it came to pass, that criminal and undeserving of mercy as they were, yet they were pitied, as being destroyed meerly to gratify his savage and cruel disposition, and not with any view to the public good."

From this quotation it appears, that the Christians were considered by the heathens as a sect that had been almost crushed by the death of their Master, but suddenly recovered strength, and spread far and near soon afterwards ; that they were so extremely odious, on account of the supposed absurdity and wickedness of their principles, as to be thought capable of committing the worst crimes, when no sufficient proof could be found of their having committed any ; that they were treated as the professed enemies of mankind, and therefore, upon the first occasion that offered, were promiscuously destroyed with the most unrelenting cruelty ; that they did not suffer as common malefactors, who, when under the actual punishment of their crimes, are usually beheld with some commiseration, but that insult and derision were added to the most exquisite

exquisite inventions of torture ; and lastly, that if these violent proceedings were blamed by any, it proceeded rather from the hatred they bore to Nero, than from a suspicion that the Christians met with any thing more than their just desert. These things are carefully to be observed, if we would form a right judgment of the primitive church. It is possible many persons suppose, that St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians, were (like the pastoral letters of bishops in our own times) addressed to the bulk of the inhabitants in those places ; but the case was far otherwise. The Romans, to whom St. Paul wrote, were inconsiderable for their number, most of them contemptible in the sight of the world on account of their poverty and low rank in life, and (as the above extract from Tacitus proves) the objects of public detestation, for their attachment to the name and doctrines of Jesus.

Whether this persecution was confined to Rome, or carried on by public authority thro' all the provinces where Christians were to be found, is not absolutely certain, tho' the latter seems most probable ; for it is hardly to be supposed that Nero would rage against them in the capital, and suffer them to live in peace every where else. Tertullian expressly asserts, that Nero enjoined their destruction by public edicts in the several provinces, and his testimony seems worthy of credit, as he mentions it in his apology, which, tho' written more than a century afterwards, was not at so great a distance

distance of time but he might easily have been contradicted, if he had advanced an untruth. Besides, the example of Nero, without his express injunctions, seems to have been sufficient to awaken persecution against a people so generally hated as the Christians were. Multitudes, upon this occasion, had the honour to seal their profession with their blood; but the cause for which they suffered triumphed over all opposition, and the martyrs places in the church were supplied by an accession of fresh converts.

This storm, tho' sharp, was not of very long continuance: it terminated with the life of Nero, who was compelled (tho' with extreme reluctance) to destroy himself with his own hands, that he might escape the most ignominious punishment; he having been, by a decree of the senate, justly and solemnly branded with the character which malice and ignorance would have fixed upon the christian name, and condemned to be whipped to death as an enemy of the human race.

A. D. 68, 69.] After him, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, were successively acknowledged emperors, but their reigns were short and their deaths violent. The Jewish war, which ended in the final catastrophe and dispersion of that nation, was at this time carried on under the command of Vespasian, who, while engaged in that service, was saluted emperor by his army.

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A. D. 70.] Upon this, leaving the conduct of the war to his son Titus, he returned to Italy, and, soon after the death of Vitellius, was peaceably established in the government. Titus having a secret commission from God (whom he knew not) to execute his fierce displeasure against the Jews, upon whom wrath was now come to the uttermost, after destroying the whole country of Judea with fire and sword, laid siege to Jerusalem; and having taken it at the end of five months, with an incredible slaughter of the Jews and the destruction of the temple, he burnt the city and pulled down the very walls. More than a million of people, who had trusted in lying words, and boasted themselves of an empty profession, perished in this war; and those who survived were reduced to slavery, sold, and dispersed into all parts, at the will of the conquerors. Thus ended the Jewish œconomy; and the law of Moses having received the accomplishment of all its types, ceremonies and precepts, in the person, life and death of Jesus the Messiah, was irrevocably abrogated as to its observance, which was rendered utterly impracticable by the destruction of the temple and the cessation of the priesthood.

A. D. 79.] Under Vespasian, and Titus who succeeded him, the christian church enjoyed considerable peace and liberty, though, upon many occasions, they suffered from the ill-will of their adversaries. Few, however, were put to death, publicly and professedly
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for their religion, till Domitian, who came to the empire after his brother Titus, [A. D. 81.] and who too much resembled Nero in his temper and conduct, imitated him likewise in employing his power against the followers of Christ. [A. D. 94.] Several are mentioned in history who suffered in his time, but as little of moment, or that can be fully depended on, is recorded concerning them, I wave a recital of bare names. It is generally believed that St. John was banished to the isle of Patmos by this emperor, where he wrote his epistles to the churches of Asia, and the revelation of future events which he had received from the Lord. Some there are who place these events much earlier, under the reign of Claudius, but the former opinion seems most probable, and best supported by the testimony of the ancients; but the story of his having been cast into a caldron of boiling oil, in the presence (as some add) of the Roman senate, does not seem supported by any tolerable evidence. It is believed that he gained his liberty from banishment, and returned to Ephesus, or the neighbouring parts; that he afterwards wrote his gospel a little before his death, which is supposed to have happened about the last year of the century. If so, he was probably about an hundred years of age, and survived the rest of the apostles a considerable space.

Domitian, having made the earth groan under his cruelties and excesses, was assassinated

nated in the sixteenth year of his reign. [*A. D.* 96.] Nerva succeeded (a man of much fairer character) who repealed the sanguinary edicts of his predecessor; and it does not appear that the Christians were generally persecuted during his short government. Before his death (for he did not live two years) he adopted Trajan for his successor, who came to the empire [*A. D.* 98.] with a general approbation, and is still reputed one of the best and wisest princes that Rome was favoured with. From his conduct, and that of some of the following emperors, it appeared that the gospel of Christ was not only hated by such persons as Nero and Domitian, who seemed professed enemies to every thing that was good and praise-worthy, but that men who desired to be thought the patrons of virtue, and to act upon the most benevolent principles, had objections equally strong against it; for if Trajan did not issue edicts expressly against the Christians, there was a very sharp persecution carried on against them in his reign; and when Pliny (in an epistle still extant) represented to him the greatness of their sufferings, and the multitude and innocence of the sufferers, the emperor interposed no farther by his answer, than to forbid informations against them, upon suspicion, to be encouraged, but directed that such as were proved to be Christians, and refused to join in the heathen sacrifices, should suffer death: and when he visited Asia, Ignatius, who was bishop
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of Antioch, being brought before him, he condemned him, with his own mouth, to be sent to Rome, to be devoured by wild beasts. But we shall resume the account of what happened under his reign hereafter, his second or third year [*A. D.* 100.] coinciding, according to the generally-received computation, with the end of the first century, which I have fixed as the limit of our researches in the present volume.

But before I conclude the chapter, it may be useful to enquire what might be the motives which influenced the heathens so eagerly to embrace every occasion of shewing their displeasure against the professors of christianity.

The original and proper cause of the injurious treatment the first Christians met with from the heathens, and particularly from the Roman government, which usually tolerated every kind of religious worship that did not interfere with the public tranquillity and the obedience due to the state, was one that is of an abiding and universal influence, namely, that enmity of the carnal heart which cannot be brought to submit to the wisdom and will of God. This has been the secret source of all the persecution which has been the lot of the true disciples of Christ in every age. The sublime doctrines of the gospel were offensive to the pretended wisdom of men, and the spirituality of its precepts no less thwarted their passions. Men, *if only left to themselves*, cannot but oppose a system which, at the same
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time that it reduces all their boasted distinctions of character to a perfect level in point of acceptance with God, enjoins a life and conversation absolutely inconsistent with the customs and pursuits which universally prevail, and brands many of the most allowed and authorised practices with the hard names of wickedness and folly. But they are not left to themselves, but are, in a degree they are little aware of, under the influence of Satan, who, for the power he maintains and exerts over them, is stiled in scripture, The God of this World. Since their own evil dispositions are thus instigated by the great enemy of God and goodness, it is entirely owing to the powerful restraints of the providence of the Most High, that his servants can, at any time, or in any place, enjoy an interval of rest; and tho' he has always made good his promise in favour of his church, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; tho' they who oppose it, successively perish and leave their schemes unfinished, while the interest against which they rage triumphs over all their attacks, and subsists, revives and flourishes amidst the changes which sweep away almost the remembrance of the most prosperous human establishments—yet he is pleased, for wise reasons, to permit them to try what they can do. Hereby the faith and patience of his people are strengthened and displayed, his care over them illustrated, and those who are sincerely devoted to him are evidently distinguished from hypocrites
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and pretenders, who join in an outward attachment to his gospel in times of prosperity, but are presently wearied and disgusted when storms and troubles arise.

Amongst the more particular reasons why christianity was obnoxious to the heathens, not only persons of vile character, as Nero; but to such as Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, who are, even to this day, highly extolled for their probity and discernment; we may mention these that follow: and more than one of them may be easily accommodated to similar events which stand upon the records of history, down to our own times, and their effects will probably be felt by many who are yet unborn.

The Doctrine of the Cross perhaps was, and always will be, the capital offence. The Christians professed to place all their hopes on the actions and sufferings of One, who died, to all appearance, like a common malefactor. This, considered in one view, was thought such a kind and degree of infatuation, as provoked the most sovereign and universal contempt; and, in another view, it raised a grave concern for the interests of morality and virtue, in those whose pride was flattered by their own empty declamations on those sounding topics. Every thing that was evil, they thought, might be expected from men who openly declared that they hoped for eternal happiness, not for their own works, which in this connection they depreciated and renounced,

but on account of the righteousness and mediation of another. If it was possible that Christians could maintain that course of conduct which the gospel requires, and, at the same time, conceal the principles and motives on which they act, they might perhaps come off more easily with the world; for the justice, temperance, goodness and truth, which become their high calling, are suited to conciliate peace with all men. But their principles must not, cannot, be concealed. Those who know and love Jesus, and are sensible of their immense obligations to him, will glory in him, and in him only; they will avow, that it is not by their own power or holiness that they escape the pollutions of the world, but that they derive all their strength from faith in his blood, and from the supports of his grace. They dare not conceal this, nor do they desire it, tho' they are sensible that the world, whether it bears the name of heathen or christian, will hate and despise them for it.

2. The Romans, tho' attached to their old system of idolatry, were not averse to the admission of new divinities, upon the ground of what a modern writer calls, a spirit of inter-community; that is, every one had liberty to adopt what worship he pleased, provided due honour was given to the antient establishments. The votaries of the Ægyptian, Roman and Syrian deities, while they paid some peculiar regard to their own favourites, indulged each other in a mutual acknowledgment of the rest; but

but the religion of Jesus was absolutely incompatible with them all, would admit of no competition, and his followers could not avoid declaring, upon all occasions, that they were no gods that were made with hands. On this account they were considered as a most uncharitable, proud, and narrow-hearted sect, as the Jews, for the same reason, had been before them. And thus it will always be—Nothing will more effectually secure a man in the peaceful possession of his own errors, than his pleading for the indifference of error in general, and allowing those who most widely differ from him, to be all right in their own way; and this lukewarm comprehension, which is a principal part of that pretended candour and charity for which our own times are so remarkable, preserves a sort of intercourse or confederacy amongst multitudes, who are hardly agreed, in any one thing, but their joint opposition to the spirit and design of the gospel. But they who love the truth cannot but declare against every deviation from it; they are obliged to decline the proposed intercommunity, and to vindicate the commands and institutions of God from the inventions and traditions of men; they not only build for themselves upon the foundation which God has laid in Zion, but they are free to profess their belief, that other foundation can no man lay, that there is no other name given under heaven by which a sinner can be saved, and that none can have an interest in this name

but by that faith which purifies the heart, works by love, and overcomes the world : therefore they always have been, and always will be hated, as uncharitable and censorious, and are sure to be treated accordingly, so far as opportunity and circumstances will permit those, who think themselves aggrieved, to discover their resentment.

3. The wisest and most respectable characters among the heathen rulers, either for reasons of state, or from their own superstition, were generally the most solicitous to preserve the old religion from innovations. The history of mankind furnishes us with frequent proofs, that persons, in other respects, of the greatest penetration and genius, have often been as blindly devoted to the absurdities of a false religion, as the weakest among the vulgar ; or if they have seen the folly of many things that have the sanction of antiquity and custom, yet the maxims of a false policy, and that supposed connection and alliance between the established religion and the welfare of the state which has been instilled into them from their infancy, induce them to think it their interest, if not their duty, to keep up the same exterior, and to leave things as they found them. Trajan seems to have been influenced by these considerations ; he was zealous for the heathen system, in which he had been educated, and regarded it (as the Romans were accustomed to do) as the basis, or at least the chief security, of the government. The Christians therefore
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were to be punished, not only for their obstinacy in maintaining their own opinions, but as being eventually enemies to the state; for tho' their conduct was peaceable, and they paid a chearful obedience to laws and governors, while they did not interfere with that obedience they owed to Christ their supreme Lord, yet their doctrines, which struck at the very root of idolatry, made them accounted dangerous to society, and deserving to be exterminated from it.

4. These suspicions were strengthened by the great success and spread the gospel obtained in this first century: within the compass of a few years it had extended to almost every part of the Roman empire. In this view it appeared formidable, and called for a speedy and vigorous suppression before it should become quite insuperable, by the accession of fresh strength and numbers. But the event did not answer their expectation: believers grew and multiplied in defiance of all the cruelties exercised upon them; the numbers and constancy of the sufferers, and the gentle spirit of meekness, forgiveness and love, which they discovered, often made lasting impressions upon the people, sometimes upon their tormentors and judges; and, by the blessing of God upon their doctrine, thus powerfully recommended by their conduct, and sealed by their blood, new converts were continually added to the church.

5. When it was thus determined to extirpate (if possible) these odious and dangerous people, pretexts and occasions were always ready; slanderous reports, concerning their tenets and assemblies, were industriously promoted, and willingly believed. Some of these took their rise from misapprehension; some were probably invented by those who apostatized from the church, who, to justify themselves, as well as to evince their sincerity, pretended to make discoveries of horrid evils that prevailed amongst them, under the disguise of religion. Many, who would not have invented such stories themselves, were however well pleased to circulate what they had heard, and took it for granted that every thing was true, which confirmed the opinion they had before entertained of this pestilential and despicable sect. But neither violence nor calumny could prevail against the cause and people of God and his Christ: they were supported by an almighty arm, and tho' many had the honour to lay down their lives in this glorious cause, many more were preserved, by his providence, in the most dangerous circumstances.

The gospel of Christ, tho' contradictory to the received opinions, laws, customs and pursuits of every place where it appeared, tho' unsupported either by arts or arms, tho' opposed by power and policy on every side, in a space of about sixty-six years from our Lord's ascension (according to the promise he gave his disciples) had spread successively from Jerusalem, thro'
Judea

Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth. Christians were to be found in every province where the Roman power ruled, and in most of their principal cities; and tho' not many noble, mighty, or wise were called, yet some there were, and the power of the grace of Jesus was displayed in every rank of life. Courtiers, senators and commanders, notwithstanding the difficulty of their situation, were not ashamed of his cross; and some of the learned obtained that peace and happiness, by embracing his gospel, which they had sought to no purpose in the vain intricacies of a false philosophy. Nor was the success of the gospel confined within the limits of the Roman empire, but extended eastward to Parthia and Babylon, where the Roman eagles were not acknowledged. We are not sure, however, that there were *many* collected societies of Christians in *every* province, or that those societies were in general very numerous: those parts of Asia and Greece which had been the scene of St. Paul's labours, seem to have had the greatest number of settled churches in proportion to their extent, and their largest assemblies were probably in their principal cities, such as Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. But we have reason to believe, from our Lord's own declarations, that real Christians, in the most flourishing times^m of the church, have been very few, in comparison with the *many* who chose the broad and beaten road which

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leads

^m Matt. 7. 13, 14.

leads to destruction : but these few are under his conduct and blessing, as the salt of the earth, and are therefore scattered far and wide, according to the disposal of his wise providence, who appoints the time of their birth, and the bounds of their habitation.

If, by the epithet *primitive*, we mean that period during which the professed churches of Christ preserved their faith and practice remarkably pure, and uninfluenced by the spirit and maxims of the world, we cannot extend it far beyond the first century. We are sure that a mournful declension prevailed very early, and quickly spread, like a contagion, far and wide : and indeed the seeds of those evils, which afterwards produced such a plentiful harvest of scandals and mischiefs, were already sown, and began to spring up, while the apostles were yet living. And we shall shew hereafter, that the first and purest age of the church was not free from such blemishes as have been observable in all succeeding revivals of true religion. These things are to be guarded against with the utmost attention, but they will more or less appear while human nature continues in its present state of infirmity. While the professors of christianity were few, in comparison of their opponents, while they were chiefly poor and obscure persons, and had sharp persecutions to grapple with, so long they preserved the integrity and purity of their profession in general, and the disorders which appeared among them were faithfully and successfully

cessfully opposed and corrected ; afflictions and sufferings kept them firmly united in a love to the truth and to each other : but when they were favoured with intervals of peace, and the increase of numbers and riches seemed to give them a more fixed establishment in the world, they were soon corrupted, and that beautiful simplicity, which is the characteristic of genuine christianity, was obscured by will-worship and vain reasonings. Amongst the multitudes who abandoned idolatry, and embraced the christian faith, there were several who had borne the specious name of philosophers. Some of these, on the one hand, laboured to retain as many of their favourite sentiments as they could, by any means, reconcile to the views they had formed of the gospel ; and on the other hand, they endeavoured, if possible, to accommodate the christian scheme to the taste and prejudices of the times, in hopes thereby to make it more generally acceptable. Thus the doctrines of the scripture were adulterated by those within the church, and misrepresented to those without. Perhaps the first alterations of this kind were not attempted with a bad intention, or extended to the most important points ; but the precedent was dangerous, for the progress of error, like that of sin, is from small beginnings to awful and unthought-of consequences. Gospel truth, like a bank opposed to a torrent, must be preserved entire, to be useful ; if a breach is once made, tho' it may seem at first to be small, none but He who says to the sea,

Hitherto

Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther, can set bounds to the threatening inundation that will quickly follow. In effect, a very considerable deviation from the plan of the apostles had taken place in the churches, before the decease of some who had personally conversed with them.

We have no ecclesiastical book of this age extant worthy of notice, except that called *The First of the Two Epistles to the Corinthians*, which are ascribed to Clement bishop of Rome, who is supposed to be the Clement mentioned by St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans. This epistle is not unsuitable to the character of the time when it was written, and contains many useful things : yet it is not (as we have it) free from fault, and, at the best, deserves no higher commendation, than as a pious well-meant performance ; it stands first, both in point of time and merit, in the list of those writings which bear the name of the apostolical fathers, for the rest of them (if the genuine productions of the persons whose names they bear) were composed in the second century : for as to the epistle ascribed to Barnabas, St. Paul's companion, those who are strangers to the arguments by which many learned men have demonstrated it to be spurious, may be convinced only by reading it, if they are in any measure acquainted with the true spirit of the apostles writings. We are indeed assured that both the epistles of Clement, this which bears the name of Barnabas, several
said

said to have been written by Ignatius (the authenticity of which has likewise been disputed) one by Polycarp, and the book called the Shepherd of Hermas, which is filled with visionary fables, were all in high esteem in the first ages of the church, were read in their public assemblies, and considered as little inferior to the canonical writings; which may be pleaded as one proof of what I have advanced concerning that declension of spiritual taste and discernment which soon prevailed: for I think I may venture to say, there are few, if any, of the protestant churches, but have furnished authors whose writings (I mean the writings of some one author) have far surpassed all the apostolical fathers taken together, and that not only in point of method and accuracy, but in scriptural knowledge, solid judgment, and a just application of evangelical doctrine to the purposes of edification and obedience.

But tho' the first Christians were men subject to passions and infirmities, like ourselves, and were far from deserving or desiring that undistinguishing admiration and implicit submission to all their sentiments, which were paid them by the ignorance and superstition of after-times—yet they were eminent for faith, love, self-denial, and a just contempt of the world; multitudes of them cheerfully witnessed to the truth with their blood, and, by their steadfastness and patience under trials, and their harmony among themselves, often extorted honourable testimonies even from their opposers. Could they have transmitted their
spirit,

spirit, together with their name, to succeeding generations, the face of Ecclesiastical History would have been very different from what it now bears ; but, by degrees, the love of novelty and the thirst of power, a relaxed attention to the precepts of Christ, and an undue regard to the names, authority and pretensions of men, introduced those confusions, contentions and enormities, which at length issued in an almost universal apostacy from that faith and course of practice which alone are worthy the name of christianity. The prosecution of this subject, more especially with a view to the history of the favoured few who were preserved from the general contagion, and of the treatment they met with who had the courage to censure or withstand the abuses of the times they lived in, will be attempted in the following volumes of this work, if God, in whose hands our times are, is pleased to afford opportunity, and if the specimen presented to the public, in this volume, should so far meet the approbation of competent judges, as to encourage the author to proceed.

Some particulars which may conduce to render the state of the church in the first century more evident to the reader, as well as to give light into the true state of religion amongst ourselves, and which could not be well introduced in the course of our narration, without making too frequent and too long digressions, I have, for that reason, treated of separately in the chapters that follow.

 C H A P. II.

An Essay on the Character of St. Paul, considered as an Exemplar or Pattern of a Minister of Jesus Christ.

THE success with which the first promulgation of the gospel was attended, is to be ultimately ascribed to the blessing and operation of the Holy Spirit; and the great means which the spirit of God is pleased to accompany with an efficacious power upon the souls of men, is the subject matter of the gospel itself. He concurs with no other doctrine but that of the scripture. The most laboured endeavours to produce a moral change of heart and conduct will always prove ineffectual, unless accommodated to the principles of revelation, respecting the ruin of the human nature by sin, and the only possible method of its recovery by Jesus Christ.

And as the Holy Spirit bears witness to no other doctrine, so he ordinarily restrains his blessing to those ministers who have themselves experienced the power of the truths which they deliver to others. A man may be systematically right, and strenuous in the delivery
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and defence of orthodox notions, yet if he is not in some degree possessed of the dispositions and motives which become a minister of the New Testament, he will seldom be honoured with much success or acceptance; the want of that disinterested and dependant frame of mind, which the gospel inculcates on all who profess it, will render his labours insignificant: for the Holy Spirit, on whose influence success entirely depends, will seldom co-operate with any but those who are sincerely governed by his precepts.

A great stress therefore is laid, in the New Testament, upon the principles, tempers and conduct which ought to distinguish the men who have the honour to be entrusted with the important charge of preaching the gospel of Christ. To delineate their proper character, and to form their manners suitable to their high calling, is the principal scope of the epistles to Timothy and Titus: and when we consider what we read there, in connection with many passages to the same purpose, which occur occasionally in the inspired writings, we may well adopt the apostle's words, Who is sufficient for these things? A Christian, even in private life, is exposed to innumerable snares and dangers, from his situation in an evil world, the power and subtlety of his spiritual enemies, and the influence of the body of sin in himself, which, tho' weakened and despoil'd of dominion, is not yet destroyed. A minister of the gospel, besides these trials, in
common

common with other Christians, has many peculiar to himself; his services are more difficult, his temptations more various, his conduct more noticed; many eyes are upon him—some enviously watching for his halting, and some perhaps too readily proposing him as a pattern, and content to adopt whatever has the sanction of his example: if encouraged and acceptable, he is in danger of being greatly hurt by popularity and the favour of friends: if opposed and ill-treated (and this he must expect in some instances if he is faithful) he is liable either to be surprized into anger and impatience, or to sink into dejection and fear. It is therefore a great encouragement to find from scripture (and not from scripture only) how the grace of God has enabled others, in equal circumstances of danger and temptation, to rise superior to all impediments, and to maintain such a course of conduct, that they stand proposed as proper patterns for our imitation, and call upon us to be followers of them, as they were of Christ.

Amongst these the character of St. Paul shines with a superior lustre; he stands distinguished by the eminence of his knowledge, grace, labours and success, as a noble and animating exemplar of a minister of Jesus Christ. And if it should be thought a digression from the design of an ecclesiastical history, to allot a few pages to the consideration of his principles, and the uniform tenor of his life, yet I hope the digression will not be unprofitable in itself,

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or judged unsuitable to my general plan; for I proposed not to confine myself to a dry detail of facts, but to point out the genuine tendency of the gospel where it is truly received, and the spirit by which it is opposed, and to shew the impossibility of reviving practical godliness by any other means than those which were so signally successful in the first age of the church.

Was I to exhibit any recent character with these views, the exceptions of partiality and prejudice would not be so easily obviated; the merits of such a character, however commendable upon the whole, would be objected to, and the incidental infirmities and indiscretions of the person (for the best are not wholly free from blemish) would be studiously collected and exaggerated, as a sufficient contrast to all that could be said in his praise. But modesty forbids the same open disingenuous treatment of one who was an apostle of Christ: besides, he lived and died long ago; and as some learned men have found, or pretended to find, a way to reconcile his writings with the prevailing taste of the times, he is commended in general terms, and claimed as a patron by all parties of the religious world; therefore I am warranted to take it for granted, that none who profess the name of Christians will be angry with me for attempting to place his spirit and conduct in as full a light as I can, or for proposing him as a proper criterion, whereby to judge of the merits and pretensions of all who account themselves ministers of Christ.

Many

Many things worthy our notice and imitation have occurred concerning this apostle whilst we were tracing that part of his history which St. Luke has given us in the Acts ; but I would now attempt a more exact delineation of his character, as it is farther exemplified in his own epistles, or may be illustrated from a review of what has been occasionally mentioned before.

We may observe much of the wisdom of God in disposing the circumstances in which his people are placed previous to their conversion : they only begin to know *him* when he is pleased to reveal himself to them by his grace, but he knew *them* long before ; he determines the hour of their birth, their situation in life, and their earliest connections ; he watches over their childhood and youth, and preserves them from innumerable evils and dangers into which their follies, while in a state of ignorance and sin, might plunge them ; and he permits their inclinations to take such a course, that, when he is pleased to call them to the knowledge of his truth, many consequences of their past conduct, and the reflections they make upon them, may concur upon the whole in a subserviency to fit them for the services into which he designs to lead them afterwards. Thus he leads the blind by a way that they knew not, and often, for the manifestation of his wisdom, power and grace, in bringing good out of evil, he, for a season, gives them up so far to the effects of their own

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depravity,

depravity, that, in the judgment of men, none seem more unlikely to be the subjects of his grace, than some of those whom he has purposed not only to save from ruin, but to make instrumental to the salvation of others. I doubt not but some of my readers, who are acquainted with their own hearts, will easily apply this observation to themselves; but there are instances in which the contrast is so striking and strong, that it will be made for them by those who know them. It is however peculiarly exemplified in the case of St. Paul: he was set apart from the womb (as he himself tells us^a) to be a chosen instrument of preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. The frame of his heart and the manner of his life, the profession he had made, and the services in which he was engaged before his conversion, were evidently suited to render him an unsuspected as well as a zealous witness to the truth and power of the gospel, after he had embraced it. The Lord's purpose was to shew the insufficiency of all legal appointments and human attainments, the power of his grace in subduing the strongest prejudices, and the riches of his mercy in pardoning the most violent attempts against his gospel. We know not how this purpose could have been more effectually answered, in a single instance, than by making choice of our apostle, who had been possessed of every advantage that can be imagined, exclusive of the

^a Gal. i. 15.

the gospel, and in consequence of these advantages had made the most pertinacious efforts to suppress it: he was born a Jew, bred up under Gamaliel, a chief^o of the pharisees, the sect which professed the most peculiar attachment to the law of Moses: his conduct, before he became a Christian, was undoubtedly moral, if we understand morality in that lean and confined sense which it too frequently bears among ourselves, as signifying no more than an exemption from gross vices, together with a round of outward duties performed in a mercenary servile spirit, to sooth conscience and purchase the favour of God. While he was thus busied in observing the letter of the law, he tells us, He was alive—that is, he pleased himself in his own attainments, doubted not of his ability to please God, and that his state was safe and good. Upon these principles (which act uniformly upon all who are governed by them) his heart was filled with enmity against the doctrines and people of Jesus, and his blinded conscience taught him that it was his duty to oppose them: he was a willing witness at the death of Stephen^p, and from a spectator soon became a distinguished actor in the like tragedies. Such is the unavoidable gradation, in a state of nature, from bad to worse. The excess and effects of his rage are described by St. Luke in very lively colours; and he often acknowledges it in his epistles: for tho' the Lord forgave him, he knew not how to forgive

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himself

^o Phil. 3.^p Acts 22. 20.

himself for having persecuted and wasted the church of God^a: he made havock of the disciples like a lion or a wolf amongst a flock of sheep, pressing into their houses, sparing none, not even women. Thus he was filled with the hateful spirit of persecution, which is undistinguishing and unrelenting. The mischiefs he could do in Jerusalem not being sufficient to gratify his insatiable cruelty and thirst of blood, he obtained (as has been formerly observed) a commission from the high-priest to harass the disciples at Damascus. In this journey, when he was near the city, he was suddenly struck to the ground by the voice and appearance of the Lord Jesus. From that hour a memorable change took place in his heart and views, and having been baptized by Ananias, and received a free pardon of all his wickedness, with a commission to the apostolic office, he began to preach that faith which before he had so industriously laboured to destroy. In this new light we are now to consider him, and whatever might be reasonably expected from a sense of such a display of grace and mercy, in his behalf, we shall find manifested in the subsequent course of his life. Happy are those who come the nearest to such an exemplary pattern!

I. The characteristic excellence of St. Paul, which was as the spring or source of every other grace, was the ardency of the supreme love he bore to his Lord and Saviour: it would
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^a Gal. i. 13. Cor. 15. 9.

not be easy to find many periods throughout his epistles which do not evidence the fulness of his heart in this respect : he seems delighted even with the sound of the name of Jesus, so that, regardless of the cold rules of studied composition, we find him repeating it ten times in the compass of ten successive verses^r. He was so struck with the just claim the Saviour had to every heart, that he accounted a want of love to him the highest pitch of ingratitude and wickedness, and deserving the utmost severity of wrath and ruin^s. When he was conscious that, for his unwearied application to the service of the gospel, in defiance of the many dangers and deaths which awaited him in every place, he appeared to many as one beside himself, and transported beyond the bounds of sober reason, he thought it a sufficient apology to say, The love of Christ constrains us^t; we are content to be fools for his sake, to be despised so he may be honoured, to be nothing in ourselves that he may be all in all : he had such a sense of the glorious invaluable excellence of the person of Christ, of his adorable condescension in taking the nature and curse of sinners upon himself, and his compleat suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption of his people, that he often seems at a loss for words answerable to the emotions of his heart ; and when he has exhausted the

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powers

^r 1 Cor. I. 1—10.^s 1 Cor. 16. 22.^t 2 Cor. 5. 14.

powers of language, and astonished his readers with his inimitable energy, he intimates a conviction of his inability to do justice to a subject, the height, and depth, and length and breadth of which are too great for our feeble capacities to grasp. But besides these general views, he was particularly affected with the exceeding abundant love and grace of Christ to himself, when he reflected on the circumstances in which the Lord had found him, and the great things he had done for him. That he who had before been a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious, should be forgiven, accepted as a child of God, entrusted with the ministry of the gospel, and appointed to everlasting salvation, was indeed an instance of wonderful grace. So it appeared to himself, and at the thought of it he often seems to forget his present subject, and breaks forth into inimitable digressions to the praise of him who had loved him, and given himself for him. Happily convinced of the tendency and efficacy of this principle in himself, he proposes it to others, instead of a thousand arguments, whenever he would inculcate the most unreserved obedience to the whole will of God, or stir up believers to a holy diligence in adorning the doctrine of their God and Saviour in all things; and his exhortations to the conscientious discharge of the various duties of relative life, are generally enforced by this grand motive. In a word, at all times and in all places, the habitual and favourite

favourite subject that employed his thoughts, his tongue and his pen, was the love of Christ.

Supported and animated by this love, he exerted himself to the utmost, in promoting the knowledge of him whom he loved, and bearing testimony to his power and grace; nothing could dishearten or weary, or terrify or bribe him from his duty : and this must and will be universally, the leading principle of a faithful minister. Should a man possess the tongue of men and angels, the finest genius, and the most admired accomplishments, if he is not constrained and directed by the love of Christ, he will either do nothing, or nothing to the purpose; he will be unable to support either the frowns or the smiles of the world; his studies and endeavours will certainly be influenced by low and selfish views; interest or a desire of applause may stimulate him to shine as a scholar, a critic, or a philosopher, but, till the love of Christ rules in his heart, he will neither have inclination nor power to exert himself for the glory of God, or the good of souls.

II. The inseparable effect, and one of the surest evidences of love to Christ, is a love to his people. Of this likewise our apostle exhibits an instructive and affecting example; the warmth and cordiality of his love to those who loved his Lord and Master, appear in every page of his writings; he so rejoiced in their prosperity, that to hear of it, at any

time, made him in a manner forget his own sorrows^u, when encompassed with troubles on every side; and tho', in many instances, he did not meet that grateful return he had reason to expect, yet he could not be discouraged: but when he had occasion to expostulate with some upon this account, he adds, I will still gladly spend and be spent for you, tho' the more I love you the less I am loved^w. Of such a generous temper as this, the world, would they observe it, must acknowledge (as the magicians in Ægypt) This is the finger of God; for nothing but his grace can produce a conduct so contrary to the natural inclination of man, as to persevere and increase in kindness and affection to those who persevere in requiting it with coldness and ingratitude. His epistles to the Thessalonians abound in such expressions and strains of tenderness as would doubtless be generally admired (especially by those who can read them in the original) were they not overlooked, thro' the unhappy disregard which too many shew to that best of books in which they are contained. When he
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^u 2 Cor. 7. 7, 13. See likewise Phil. 2. 28. Which finely intimates his tenderness and affection. He was oppressed with sorrow upon sorrow, yet he felt more for the Phillippians than for himself. He mourned over Epaphroditus, when sick, for their sakes, and sent him away for their comfort when recovered; and this he did as the most effectual means to lessen his own burthen, by sympathizing in that joy his friends would have in the interview, tho' he could not directly partake with them.

^w 2 Cor. 12. 15.

is appealing to themselves concerning the sincerity of his conduct, and how far he had been from abusing his authority, he says, We were gentle among you even as a nurse (or mother) cherisheth her children—who, by her tender and assiduous offices, supplies their inability to take care of themselves^x. (It would be well if all who have aim'd to derive a plenitude of power from the example of the apostles, were equally desirous to imitate him in the use of it.) He then adds, So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. No comment can do justice to the spirit of this sentiment, or to the force of the expression in the Greek. In another passage, which is rendered in our version, *We being taken from you*, the original term^y has an emphasis which no single word in our language can answer: it imports such a state of separation as is made between a parent and a child by the death of either, when the child is left a helpless and exposed orphan, or the parent is bereaved of the staff and comfort of his age; it beautifully intimates the endearing affection which subsisted between the apostle and the persons he was writing to, and demonstrates the greatest tenderness, simplicity and condescension. But his regard went beyond words, and was evidenced by the whole course of his actions;

^x 1 Thess. 2. 7, 8.

^y Ἀπορφανισθῆναι. 1 Thess. 2. 17.

actions ; nor was it confined to those who had enjoyed the benefits of his personal ministry, his heart was charged with the care and welfare of all the churches, and those who had not seen his face in the flesh had an unceasing share in his solicitude and prayers² ; nay, so strong was his love to the churches, that it balanced his habitual desire to be with Christ ; he could not determine which was most eligible, to suffer with the members upon earth (so that he might be serviceable to them) or to reign with the Head in heaven². In the passage referred to, we see the happy centripetal and centrifugal forces which carried him on thro' the circle of duty ; he constantly tended and gravitated to his centre of rest, but successive opportunities of usefulness and service drew him off, and made him willing to wait yet longer.

In this part of his character we are not to consider him exclusively as an apostle. All who have truly known the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation, are partakers of the same spirit according to the measure of their faith. That person is unworthy the name of a Christian, who does not feel a concern and affection for his brethren who are in the world. It must be allowed that prejudices and misapprehensions too often prevent the Lord's people from knowing each other, but, so far as they believe a person to be a child of God thro' faith, they cannot but love him. This

² Col. 2. 1.

² Phil. 1. 23, 24.

This is the immutable criterion which our Lord himself has given, whereby his real disciples are to be known and acknowledged^b; he has not directed us to judge by their discourses, their knowledge, or even their zeal, but by the evidence they give of mutual love: and we may as easily conceive of a sun without light, or a cause without an effect, as of a person duly affected with a sense of the glory of God and the love of Christ, and not proportionably filled with a spirit of love to all who are like-minded. But especially this disposition is essential to a minister of the gospel, and the apostle assures us, that all imaginable qualifications are of no avail without it; tho' we could possess the powers of a prophet or an angel, or the zeal of a martyr, if we are destitute of this love, we are, in the sight of God, but as sounding^c brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

III. St. Paul's inflexible attachment to the great doctrines of the gospel is another part of his character which deserves our attention; he knew their worth, experienced their power in his own soul, and saw that, tho' they were unacceptable to the wisdom of the world, they bore the impress of the manifold wisdom of God. He takes notice that, in those early days,

^b John 13. 35.

^c *Sounding brass*, without meaning and without life. Such are the most specious gifts and performances, if unaccompanied by a spirit of love: they may perhaps be useful to others (as the sound of a bell gives notice and brings people together) but the possessor himself is a lifeless instrument; he designs no good, and will receive no reward.

days, there were many who corrupted the word of God ^d. The word properly signifies to adulterate, to imitate the practice of dishonest vintners, who mix and sophisticate their liquors, so that, tho' the colour is preserved, and the taste perhaps nearly counterfeited, the quality and properties are quite altered and depraved: but he says, We are not as they. He preached the gospel in its purity and simplicity, the sincere genuine milk of the word, neither weakened by water ^e, or disguised by any artful sweetening to render it more palatable; he added nothing of his own, nor employed any art or gloss to palliate the truth, that it might be more acceptable to men of carnal minds; as he was not ashamed of it, neither was he afraid lest it should fall without success to the ground, if not supported and assisted by inventions of his own; he knew whose word it was, and therefore cheerfully ventured the issue with Him, who alone could procure it a welcome reception; and as he disdained the thought of deviating a tittle himself from the plain and full declaration of the truth, neither could he bear, no, not for an hour, with those who presumed to do so ^f. I doubt not but the warmth of his zeal, in this respect, has disgusted many in the present day, wherein a seeming candour and forbearance is pleaded for and extended to almost every sentiment, except the truths in which
St.

^d Καπηλευοίτες. 2 Cor. 2. 17. ^e Ἀδολοι γαλα. 1 Pet. 2. 2.
^f Gal. 2. 5.

St. Paul gloried. There is little doubt but many, if they had the courage and honesty to speak out, would add St. Paul himself to the list of those whom they despise as uncharitable and hot-brained bigots ; for who has offended more than he against the rules of that indifference to error, which is at present miscalled Charity ? The Galatians, in a short time after he left them, had ventured to admit some alteration in the doctrine they had received from him ; it was chiefly in one point : they had been persuaded into an undue regard for the law of Moses. This, some may think, was little more than a circumstantial, that it could not have any great or direct influence upon their moral practice, and that they might be very good men, and good Christians, tho', in this one thing, they could not see exactly with their teacher's eyes. But how different was the apostle's judgment ! If the Galatians had returned to the practice of idolatry, or broke out into the most scandalous immoralities, he could hardly have expressed his surprize and grief in stronger terms : he changes his usual manner of address, and speaks to them as a senseless people ^s under the power of some unaccountable fascination : he tells them that, by admitting such an addition ^h, small and inconsiderable as they might think it, they had, in effect, received another gospel, which was however so enervated and despoiled of efficacy, that it was, more properly speaking, become
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^s Gal. 3. 1.

^h Gal. 1. 6-9.

no gospel at all, utterly unworthy the least pretence to the name. Farther, he denounces an anathema (the highest curse) upon any person who should dare to preach any such pretended gospel, even tho', if such a thing were possible, it should be himself or an angel from heaven ; and this denunciation he immediately repeats, lest it should be thought that he spoke rather from warmth of temper, than from a just sense of the importance of the case. What would some of my readers think of a man who should, at this time, express himself in terms like these ? But let it be remembered that our apostle, who was so ready with an anathema upon this occasion, and who, in another place, passes the same severe judgmentⁱ upon any man who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, was far from speaking thus from emotions of anger and ill-will ; the disposition of his own mind, the tender concern with which he viewed the worst of sinners, may be judged of from his willingness to be made an anathema himself^k, after the manner of Christ, if, by all he could suffer, he might be a means of saving the Jews, who were his worst enemies, and from whom he had constantly received the most unjust and cruel treatment : but when the cause of the gospel and the honour of Christ were in question, he could not, he durst not consult with the feelings of flesh and blood, but, as the minister and messenger of the Lord, he solemnly declared what must
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ⁱ 1 Cor. 16. 22.^k Rom. 9. 3.

and will be the awful consequence of neglecting or corrupting the word of life.

Every faithful minister of the gospel is possessed of a degree of the same attention to the purity of the truth and faith once delivered to the saints ; they must not deviate from their instructions, nor can they behold with indifference the specious attempts of others to mislead the unwary ; they know what censures they must expect upon this account : it is sufficient for them that they can appeal to the searcher of hearts, that tho', as the servants of Christ, they dare not aim to please men, by speaking smooth things, yet they act from principles of benevolence and love, and would rejoice in the salvation of their greatest opposers. The world perhaps would judge more favourably of them if they knew all, if they were witnesses to the prayers and tears which they pour out for them in secret, and the emotions of mind they feel when they are constrained to declare the more awful parts of their message ; but as ministers, and in their public work, they cannot avoid pointing out the danger of those who venture their souls and eternal hopes upon any other doctrine than that which St. Paul preached.

IV. But tho' St. Paul was so tenacious of the great foundation-truths of the gospel, and would not admit or connive at any doctrine that interfered with them, he exercised, upon all occasions, a great tenderness to weak consciences, in matters that were not essential to

the faith, and when the scruples were owing rather to a want of clear light than to obstinacy. This was evident in his conduct with regard to the great controversy that soon took place between the Jewish and Gentile converts, about the distinction of meats and drinks, and other rituals enjoined by the law of Moses; the obligation¹ of which, many, who had been educated in the practice of those observances, did not immediately see were superseded by the gospel of Christ: he knew and asserted his own liberty, yet, in condescension to the weakness of others, he often abridged himself of it, and declared that, rather than grieve or cause offence to a weak brother, he would eat no meat while the world stood. His practice herein will probably be of general application, *mutatis mutandis*, so long as the present state of human infirmity subsists. A defect in knowledge, the prejudices of education and custom, the remains of a legal spirit, the influence of great names, and other causes of a like nature, will probably always operate, so far as to keep up lesser differences in judgment and practice amongst those who agree in the great and fundamental truths. The enemy gains too much advantage from these things, not to improve such differences into divisions. Self is too prevalent in the best men, and the tendency of Self is, to exact submission, to hurry to extremes, to exaggerate trifles into points of great consequence, and to render us

¹ Rom. 14.

averse to the healing expedients of peace. From these sources, discords and evils innumerable have been multiplied and perpetuated among the various denominations under which the Lord's people have been ranged, which have greatly hindered the welfare and progress of the common cause, and exposed each contending party to the scorn of their real enemies. But were the spirit and conduct of our apostle more adopted, many debates would entirely cease; and in those things where a difference of judgment would still subsist, the exercise of patience, gentleness and mutual forbearance, would perhaps afford fairer occasion for the display of the christian character, than if we were all exactly of a mind; then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak, the one would not censure nor the other despise, nor would those whose minds have been enlarged by a variety of experience and observation, think it at all strange, much less would they be angry, if others, who have not had the same advantages, cannot immediately enter into all their sentiments. St. Paul, in knowledge, abilities and usefulness, was eminently superior to all those among whom he chiefly conversed, and, as an apostle, he had a stronger right than any man, since the apostles day, could have, to exact an implicit deference and submission; but he had drunk deeply of the spirit of his Master, and we are concerned to follow him, as he followed Christ, in the exercise of tenderness to the weakest of the flock.

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It is not my present business to define what are properly essentials in the Christian Religion, and to separate them clearly from the less important points, which, for that reason, and in contra-distinction to the other, are called Circumstantials. This would lead me too far, tho', perhaps, it would not be so difficult as a person might at first expect, who should be told of all that has been written (with little satisfaction) upon the subject. I foresee a future period in our history, when a disquisition of this kind will be almost necessary; and if I am spared to reach so far, I shall probably embrace the occasion. In the mean time I would just hint an observation or two upon this head, which the intelligent reader (if he thinks them just) may apply as he sees proper.

I. Circumstantials and essentials in religion (if we speak with propriety) are derived from the same source, and resolved into the same authority. To consider the commands of God as essentials, and the inventions and traditions of men superadded thereto, as circumstantials, would be a very improper, and indeed a very false division of the subject. Nothing but what is prescribed by the word of God, or may be fairly deduced from it, is worthy the name even of a circumstantial in true religion. Human appointments, if not repugnant to scripture and the light of conscience, may be submitted to for the sake of peace, or when the general purposes of edification cannot be attained without them, but they seem not to deserve

deserve a place even among the circumstantialia of a religion which is of divine institution. All the laboured arguments, whether for or against the colour of a garment, the shape of a building, and a multitude of other things equally insignificant, seem to have occasioned a needless loss of time and temper, chiefly by a mistake of the question on both sides.

2. Essentials in christianity are those things without which no man can be a Christian in the sight of God, and by the decision of his word; and, on the other hand, those things only are essential, which whoever possesses is, by scripture declaration, in a state of favour with God through Christ. These might be branched out into many particulars, but they are fully and surely comprized in two, Faith and Holiness. These are essential to the being of a Christian, are only to be found in a Christian, are infallible tokens that the possessor is accepted in the Beloved, and whoever dies without them must assuredly perish: these are essentials, because they are absolutely necessary, for it is written, He that believeth not shall be damned^m, and, Without Holiness no man shall see the Lordⁿ: and they are essential likewise, because they demonstrate an interest in the promise of everlasting life. Thus our Lord declares, He that heareth my words, and believeth in him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life^o; and the

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apostle,

^m Mark 16. 16.

ⁿ Heb. 12. 14.

^o John 5. 24.

apostle, writing to the believing Romans, tells them, Now being made free from sin, and become the servants of God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life ^p. These then are the essentials of religion, and tho' they are produced by the same power of the holy spirit, and derived from a knowledge of the same truths, and therefore cannot be separated, they may properly be distinguished, for the conviction of those who pretend to one without the other. The most specious appearances of holiness, which are not accompanied with faith in Christ, may be safely rejected as counterfeits. On the other hand, a profession of faith which is not evidenced by the fruits of holiness, by gracious tempers, and a tenor of life becoming the gospel, is dead, delusory and destructive.

If the question is removed another step, and it should be asked, Which, or how many, of the doctrines of scripture are necessary to produce the faith and holiness supposed requisite? it may suffice to say, That, in the nature of things, no person can be expected to believe in Christ, till convinced of his need of him, and of his ability, as a Saviour, fully to answer his expectations: and as a supreme love to God, and a hatred of all sin, are evidently included in the idea of holiness, it supposes a disposition of mind, which every man's experience proves to be beyond the power of fallen nature; and therefore, a competent knowledge and cordial acceptance

acceptance of what the scripture teaches, concerning the nature and desert of sin, the person and mediatory acts of Christ, the causes, ends and effects of his mediation; together with the necessity of that change of heart which is expressed by a being born again, appear to be essentially necessary to that faith and holiness which are described in the gospel.

3. The circumstantial of religion include all those particulars of revelation, which a person, possessed of the above-mentioned essentials, may as yet be unacquainted with, or unable to judge of with certainty. A careful application to the scripture, a diligent waiting upon God in prayer, and an improvement of the means of grace, will (by the divine blessing which is promised to those who seek in this manner) increase our light, comprehension and certainty, with regard to these points, which, tho' not essentially necessary to the being of a Christian, are exceedingly conducive to his well-being, to his growth and establishment in the truth.

This subject may be, perhaps, illustrated from the animal frame, in which what we call the vital parts may be considered as essential to life, because there can be no life without them. We may easily conceive that a man may live without an arm or leg, or several members and organs, which, tho' highly valuable for use and comfort, are not necessarily connected with life; but if we conceive of him as deprived of his head, heart or lungs,

we can no longer consider him as living: yet it is desirable to have a body not only animated but organized. So likewise in religion, those who are truly partakers of it will not too curiously enquire, how much knowledge, or what degree of practice, is barely consistent with a possibility of life, but they will earnestly desire to be acquainted with the whole will of God, and that every part of it may have a suitable influence upon their practice: but in the mean time a consolation is provided, in the promises of God made to those who have received the seeds of faith and true holiness, against the fears, doubts and involuntary mistakes which, from remaining ignorance, they are yet subject to: he will supply what is wanting, pardon what is amiss, and lead them on from strength to strength; they are to walk by the light already afforded, to wait on him for an increase, to be diffident of themselves and gentle to others, and things which as yet they know not, God will, in his due time, reveal to them. But to return from this digression—

V. Every part of St. Paul's history and writings demonstrates a disinterested spirit, and that his uncommon labours were directed to no other ends than the glory of God and the good of men. No man had probably so great an influence over his hearers, or could have a juster claim, from the nature and number of his services, to a suitable provision for himself; but he could say, with truth, We seek not your's,

your's, but you. To cut off all occasions of misapprehension on this head, he usually submitted to work with his own hands, rather than^a be chargeable to his friends. It is true, he does not propose himself to us a pattern in this respect, for he tells us^r that the labourer is worthy of his hire, and that the Lord had ordained that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel; and when he saw it expedient, he did not refuse to be himself assisted by others. He shewed, by accepting such assistance from some, that he understood his liberty, and did not act from a spirit of pride or singularity when he declined it; and, by his more general practice, he evidenced that he was superior to all selfish and mercenary motives; and, upon the whole, he was content to appear and live as a poor man, and tho' he had learnt, in the school of Christ, how to abound as well as to suffer want, the latter seems to have been more frequently his lot^s; he saw too many false teachers, who, under the sanction of a sacred character, made merchandize of souls, and he not only severely

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^a 1 Cor. 9. 18. That—I may make the gospel of Christ without charge—*Ἀδωκεν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον* that I may set it before you *gratis*, or a free gospel. The messengers of good news are usually gratified with a reward, but the apostle, tho' he brought the most welcome and important tidings that ever rejoiced the hearts of men, would not encumber or disgrace the news, by receiving any thing for it: the truth is, he took as much pleasure in delivering his message as they could in hearing it, and found his reward in his employment.

^r 1 Cor. 9. 14.^s Phil. 4. 12.

censured them, but by this self-denial, which they were unable to imitate, he manifested the vanity of their pretences in setting themselves forth as the apostles of Christ. This seems to have been his chief design in it, and the reason of his repeating, with so much earnestness, his determination to take nothing from the Corinthians, who were too much inclined to listen to some of these teachers, to his disadvantage. But whatever parade they might make of gifts or zeal, or however they might presume to equal themselves to him in other respects, he knew they would not attempt to share with him in the glory of preaching the gospel freely, which was diametrically inconsistent with their whole design. The circumstances with us are so far different, that, in proposing St. Paul as a pattern of disinterestedness, we do not lay a stress upon his preaching the gospel without expence to his hearers; yet, in his noble contempt of worldly advantage, and making every thing stoop to the great ends of his mission, he stands as a precedent to all Christian ministers in succeeding times. In those passages of his epistles to Timothy and Titus, where the negative part of a minister's character (whether bishop or deacon) is given, this is constantly one branch of it, that he must not be influenced by a love of gain, and as constantly the word is compounded with the epithet, *filthy*. Not given to filthy lucre—to intimate that nothing can be more dishonest or dishonourable than to make a traffic of this service. Nor is this the judgment

judgment of scripture only, but the general voice of mankind. Nothing is a greater bar to a minister's usefulness, or renders his person and labours more contemptible, than a known attachment to money, a griping fist and a hard heart. They who enter into the priest's office for a piece of bread, who are less concerned for the flock than the fleece, who employ all their arts and influence to exchange a less emolument for a greater, or to superadd one to another, may have the reward they seek ; but of all the methods of acquiring wealth, which do not directly expose a man to the lash of human laws, this is the most to be lamented and avoided. If the scriptures are true, if St. Paul was a servant of Christ, and if the authority of his precepts and example is still binding, a day will come when mercenary preachers will wish they had begg'd their bread from door to door, or been chained to the oar of a galley for life, rather than have presumed to intrude into the church upon such base and unworthy views. It is to be feared that too many read the awful denunciations upon this head, in the prophets Jeremiah^t and Ezekiel^u, with indifference, as supposing they only relate to the Jews who lived at that time ; but they are equally applicable to all who prostitute the word and worship of God to the purposes of ambition and avarice.

VI. From the foregoing particulars we may collect the idea of true christian zeal, as exemplified

^t Jer. 23.

^u Ezek. ch. 13 and 34.

plified in our apostle. Hardly any word in our language is more misunderstood or abused, than Zeal^w. It is used in the New Testament indifferently in a good or bad sense, and it is considered as a vice or virtue according to its object and principle. It sometimes denotes envy^x, indignation or disdain, an obstinate and ignorant opposition to the truth, a misguided warmth in unnecessary things, and a contentious disputatious temper. A zeal replete with these characters has too frequently been the bane and opprobrium of the christian church; but it is good to be zealously affected in a good thing, and then it is sinful to be otherwise. Our passions were not given us in vain. When the judgment is well informed, and the understanding duly enlightened by the word of God, the more warmth the better; but this earnestness, in an ignorant or prejudiced person, is dangerous and hurtful to himself and others;
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^w All religious parties profess a great regard to the precept, Jude 3. Contend earnestly for the faith. And if noisy anger, bold assertions, harsh censures, and bitter persecuting zeal, can singly or jointly answer the apostle's design, there is hardly a party but may glory in their obedience: but if the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, if the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God—if the true christian contention can only be maintained by scripture arguments, meekness, patience, prayer, and an exemplary conversation—If this is the true state of the case, where is the church or party (may I not say, where is the person) that has not still much to learn and to practise in this point?

^x Compare Acts 5. 17. Rom. 13. 13. Rom. 10. 2. Phil. 3. 6. Gal. 1. 14. Acts 21. 20. James 3. 16. in all which places the word is the same that is rendered Zeal in 2 Cor. 9. 2. Col. 4. 13. John 2. 17.

it is like haste in a man in the dark, who knows not where he is going, nor what mischiefs he may suffer or occasion. False zeal spends its strength in defence of names and forms, the externals of religion or the inventions of men; it enforces its edicts by compulsion and severity; it would willingly call for fire from heaven, but, unable to do this, it kindles the flame of persecution, and (if not providentially restrained) wages war with the peace, comfort and liberty of all who disdain to wear its chains, and breathes threatening slaughter and destruction with an unrelenting spirit; its mildest weapons (which it never employs alone, except where it is check'd by a superior power) are calumny, contempt and hatred, and the objects it seeks to worry are generally the quiet in the land, and those who worship God in spirit and in truth: in a word, it resembles the craft by which it works, and is earthly, sensual, devilish. But the true christian zeal is a heavenly gentle flame; it shines and warms, but knows not to destroy; it is the spirit of Christ infused with a sense of his love into the heart; it is a generous philanthropy and benevolence, which, like the light of the sun, diffuses itself to every object, and longs to be the instrument of good (if possible) to the whole race of mankind; a sense of the worth of souls, the importance of unseen things, and the awful condition of unawakened sinners, makes it indeed earnest and importunate, but this it shews not by bitterness and

and constraint, but by an unwearied perseverance in attempting to overcome^y evil with good ; it returns blessings for curses, prayers for ill-treatment, and, tho' often reviled and affronted, cannot be discouraged from renewed efforts to make others partakers of the happiness itself possesses ; it knows how to express a becoming indignation against the errors and follies of men, but towards their persons^z it is all gentleness and compassion ; it weeps (and would, if possible, weep tears of blood) over those who will not be persuaded, but, while it plainly represents the consequences of their obstinacy, it trembles at^a its own declarations, and

^y See Rom. 22. 20, 21. This practice the apostle recommends by the metaphor of heaping coals of fire on an enemy's head. As metals that endure a moderate warmth, without alteration, are melted down and quite dissolved by an intense heat, so the hard heart, even of an enemy, may be sometimes softened by a series, an indefatigable heaping up, of favours and obligations. This is a noble piece of chemistry, but almost as much out of repute and practice as the search after the philosopher's stone. ^z When St. Paul, speaking of the Judaizing false teachers and their adherents, says, I would they were even cut off which trouble you, he seems to allude to the circumcision they so strenuously enforced, Gal. 5. 12. Compare Phil. 3. 2. His wish concerning these sectaries has been often perverted, to give sanction to the rage of persecutors ; but he does not mean to cut them off with fire and sword, or to cut them off from fire and water, but to have them excluded from communion and converse with true believers. ^a How awful to declare, to denounce the terrors of the Lord ! Those terrors which are represented to us by fire unquenchable, with the additional idea of eternity, Matt. 3. 12. Mark 9. 43. As such descriptions shock and alarm a guilty conscience,

and feels for them who cannot feel for themselves ; it is often grieved, but cannot be provoked. The zealous Christian is strictly observant of his own *failings*, candid and tender to the *faults* of others ; he knows what allowances are due to the frailty of human nature and the temptations of the present state, and willingly makes all the allowances possible ; and, tho' he dare not call evil good, cannot but judge according to the rule of the scripture, yet he will conceal the infirmities of men as much as he can, will not speak of them without just cause, much less will he aggravate the case, or boast himself over them. Such was the zeal of our apostle : bold and intrepid in the cause of God and truth, unwearied in service, inflexible in danger, when duty called he was not to be restrained either by the threats of enemies, the solicitations of friends, or the prospect of any hardships to which he might be exposed ; he cheerfully endured hunger and thirst, watching and weariness, poverty and contempt, and counted not his life dear, so that he might fulfil the great purposes of the ministry which he had received of the Lord. But at the same time, in all his intercourse
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conscience, there are two different methods by which the removal of this alarm is attempted : some seek and find peace and security from the blood of Jesus ; and some, who are not pleased with this method, satisfy themselves and their friends with criticisms upon the terms, and tell us that the phrase *for ever and ever* signifies a limited space, and *fire that cannot be quenched* denotes fire that goes out of itself.

with men, he was gentle, mild and compassionate; he studied the peace, and accommodated himself to the weakness of all about him; when he might command he used entreaties, when he met with hard and injurious treatment he bore it patiently, and, if opportunity offered, requited it with kindness. Thus as he had drunk of the spirit, so he walked in the steps of his Lord and Master.

All who bear the name of ministers of Christ, would do well to examine how far their tempers and conduct are conformable to St. Paul's. Are there not too many who widely differ from him? Where he was immoveable as an iron pillar, they are flexible and yielding as a reed waving in the wind, suiting their doctrines and practice to the depraved taste of the world, and prostituting their talents and calling to the unworthy pursuit of ambition and applause. On the other hand, in things less essential, or not commanded, they invade the rights of private judgment, and attempt to bind^b heavy yokes and impositions upon those whom Christ has made free; and while they readily tolerate (if not

^b Matt. 23. 4. *They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, a weight of traditions and observances, and lay them upon mens shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.* There is a double opposition in this passage—between *to be borne* and *to move*, and between the *shoulders* and a *finger*. It has been often found since, that those who are most impatient of restraint themselves, are most earnest in pressing yokes and bonds upon others.

not countenance) scepticism and immorality, they exert all their strength and subtlety to disquiet or suppress those who differ from them in the slightest circumstance, if they profess to differ for conscience-sake. But Jesus has no such ministers: their claim is utterly vain; none but those who are ignorant of the plainest truths can allow them this character; their tempers, their behaviour, the tenor of their professed instructions, and the total want of efficacy and influence in their ministrations, plainly demonstrate that he neither sent them nor owns them.

VII. Having considered the subject-matter and the leading views of the apostle's ministry, it may not be improper to take some notice of his *manner* as a preacher. This he reminds the Corinthians of. They were reputed a polite and ingenious people. St. Paul was aware of their character, and expresses himself as if he had been deliberating, before he saw them, in what way he should address them with the fairest probability of success: he tells them^c, that he determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ, and him crucified, including, in this one comprehensive expression, the whole scheme of gospel doctrine: and as to the *manner* in which he delivered this doctrine, he says, My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and with power. We are sure that he did not renounce
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^c 1 Cor. 2. 1—4.

justness of reasoning or propriety of expression ; in these respects he exceeded their most-admired orators, as may appear to any who have skill and candour to compare his epistles and discourses (in the original) with the best performances of the Greek writers ; but he renounced *the enticing* or plausible *words of man's wisdom*. In the term *man's wisdom*, I apprehend may be included whatever the natural faculties of man are capable of discovering or receiving, independent of the peculiar teaching of the spirit of God, which is promised and restrained to those who, sensible of their own foolishness, are brought to believe in Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God ; and the *enticing words* of man's wisdom may include all those ways and arts which the wise men of the world have used, or approved, as most effectual to express, adorn^d or defend their own wise sentiments and discoveries. These, and the methods of setting them off to advantage, have been divided into many branches, and dignified with sounding names ; but all the efforts of

^d In 1 Cor. 14. 9. St. Paul recommends *words easy to be understood*. His reasoning in that chapter is levelled not only against the absurdity of speaking in an unknown tongue, but against the use of any terms, or the treating upon any subjects, which are not adapted to the level of the auditory. Many discourses that are expressed in English phrases, are as useless to the bulk of the people as if they were delivered in Greek ; for what have the people to do with scholastic or metaphysical niceties, or curious researches into antiquity, or elegant dissertations upon the fitness of things ? They cannot understand them, and if they could, they would find them nothing to their purpose.

of man's wisdom, considered as engaged in the subjects of religion and morals, may be summed up in three particulars. 1. A vain enquiry into things which lie wholly beyond the capacity of man in his present state, and which can only be discovered by supernatural revelation. 2. A vain attempt to account for every thing according to the light and principles of depraved reason. 3. A studious exactness in language, either an easy flow of words to please and amuse the ear, or a torrent of strong and figurative expressions to engage the passions, according as a different taste or fashion happens to prevail. It would be too dry a task to illustrate these points, by adducing specimens of each from the works of the ancient and modern philosophers: but if we had not other employment in hand, it would be easy to shew that man's wisdom, in the first sense, is Uncertainty; in the second, Prejudice; in the third, Impostition and Artifice. It is sufficient for my present purpose, that the apostle renounced them all. Instead of vain^e conjectures, he spoke from certain experience; he could say, I received of the Lord that which I also deli-

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* Tho' the apostle disclaimed the light sophistry which obtained in the schools, the tenor of his preaching was founded upon the clearest principles, and contained a chain of the justest consequences; he did not only assert, but prove and demonstrate, the truth of his doctrines, by ancient prophecies, by recent facts, and by a present incontestible efficacy. Yet it is called the demonstration of the spirit, to intimate that the strongest and best adapted evidence is insufficient to the purposes of salvation, unless accompanied with a divine power.

vered to you : instead of accommodating his doctrine to the taste and judgment of his hearers, he spoke with authority, in the name of God whom he served : instead of losing time in measuring words and syllables, that he might obtain the character of a fine speaker, he spoke, from the feeling and fullness of his heart, the words of simplicity and truth. The success of his preaching did not at all depend upon the softness and harmony of his periods, and therefore he disdained an attention to those petty ornaments of speech, which were quite necessary to help out the poverty of *man's wisdom* ; he sought something else, which those who preach themselves, rather than Christ Jesus the Lord, have little reason^f to expect, I mean, the power and demonstration of the spirit ; he knew that this alone could give him success : and ministers may learn from him, what to avoid and what to seek for, if they would be useful to their hearers. Men can but *declare* the truths of the gospel : it is the spirit of God who alone can *reveal* them : nothing less than a divine power can present them to the mind in their just importance, and
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^f A man who has languages and science in his head, but does not know or relish the gospel of Christ, is an ignorant, indeed, a stupid person, unaffected with the grandest view of wisdom, power and goodness, that ever was, or can be displayed ; and whoever truly knows and embraces this mystery of godliness, is a wise man, a person of an excellent understanding, tho' he may not be much acquainted with those uncertain, unsatisfying systems, which men have agreed to honour with the name of knowledge. See Ps. III. 10.

throw light into the soul by which they may be perceived ; nothing less than this power can subdue the will, and open the heart to receive the truth in the love of it ; without this concurring agency, even St. Paul would have preached in vain. From what has been said, we may remark two obvious reasons (amongst others) why we have so much unsuccessful preaching in our days ; either the gospel truths are given up, or the gospel simplicity departed from. Where either of these is the case, the Lord refuses his power and blessing.

VIII. Another observable part of St. Paul's character, is his unaffected humility. In the midst of his eminent and extensive services, he retained a deep sense of the part he once acted against the Lord. He speaks of himself, on this account, in the most abasing language, as the chief of sinners, and strongly expresses his unworthiness of the grace and apostleship he had received, by comparing himself to an untimely birth^ε ; and tho' his insight into the mysteries of the gospel, the communion he maintained with God, by faith in his Son,

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^ε 1 Cor. 15. 8. As one born out of due time. The original word is *ἔκτρωμα*, that is, *An abortion*. He speaks of himself under this despicable image (the true sense of which is not easily perceived by an English reader) to shew the deep and humbling sense he retained of the part he once acted against the church of Christ ; he considered himself as unworthy and contemptible to the last degree, as one of whom no good hope could be justly formed at that time, much less that he should be honoured with a sight of the Lord Jesus from heaven, and with a call to the apostolic office.

and the beauty of holiness which shone in his conversation were all beyond the common measure, yet having, in the same proportion, a clearer sense of his obligations, and of the extent and purity of the divine precepts, he thought nothing of his present attainments, in comparison of those greater degrees of grace he was ^b still pressing after. While, in the eyes of others, he appeared not only exemplary, but unequalled, he esteemed himself less than the least of ⁱ all saints; and his patience and condescension towards others, and his acquiescence under all the trying dispensations of providence with which he was exercised, were a proof that this was not an affected manner of expression, but the genuine dictate of his heart. To speak of one's-self in abasing terms is easy, and such language is often a thin veil, thro' which the motions of pride may be easily discerned; but tho' the language of humility may be counterfeited, its real fruits and actings are inimitable. Here again he is a pattern for Christians. An humble frame of mind is the strength and ornament of every other grace, and the proper soil wherein they grow. A proud Christian, that is, one who has a high conceit of his own abilities and attainments, is no less a contradiction, than a sober drunkard,

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^b Phill. 3. 13. *Forgetting the things that are behind.* As a traveller upon urgent business posits from place to place, forgets the distance and inconveniences behind him, and has all his thoughts taken up with the place he would be at, and the remainder of the road that leads to it.

ⁱ Ephes. 3. 8.

or a generous miser. All other seeming excellencies are of no real value, unless accompanied with this ; and tho' a person should appear to have little more than a consciousness of his own insufficiency, and a teachable dependent spirit, and is waiting upon the Lord, in his appointed way, for instruction and a blessing, he will infallibly thrive as a tree planted by the water-side^k; for God, who resisteth the proud, has promised to give grace to the humble. But, in an especial manner, humility is necessary and beautiful in a minister ; the greatest abilities and most unwearied diligence will not ensure success without it ; a secret (if allowed) apprehension of his own importance, will deprive him of that assistance, without which he can do nothing ; his arm will be dried up, and his right eye will be darkened^l: for the Lord of hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all human glory, and will honour none but those who abase themselves, and are willing to give all the praise to him alone. If any man had ground to set a value upon his knowledge, gifts and services, St. Paul might justly claim the pre-eminence ; but tho' he was an apostle, and an inspired writer, tho' he had planted churches thro' a considerable part of the known world, tho' he was received as an angel by many to whom he preached, and, by a peculiar favour, had been caught up into the third heaven, yet he was, by grace, preserved from being exalted above measure, or from

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^k James 4. 6.^l Zech. 11. 17.

assuming an undue superiority over his brethren. The authority with which he was entrusted he employed solely to their advantage, and accounted himself the least of all, and the servant of all. How very opposite has been the conduct of many since his time, who have aimed to appropriate the name of Ministers of Christ, exclusively, to themselves!

Such was our apostle, and the same spirit (tho' in an inferior degree) will be found in all the faithful ministers of the Lord Jesus: they love his name; it is the pleasing theme of their ministry, and to render it glorious in the eyes of sinners is the great study of their lives; for his sake, they love all who love him, and are their willing servants to promote the comfort and edification of their souls; they love his gospel, faithfully proclaim it without disguise or alteration, and shun not to declare the whole counsel of God, so far as they are themselves acquainted with it; they contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and are desirous to preserve and maintain the truth, in its power and purity; the knowledge of their own weakness and fallibility makes them tender to the weaknesses of others, and tho' they dare not lay, or allow, any other foundation than that which God has laid in Zion, yet, knowing that the kingdom of God does not consist in meats and drinks, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, they guard against the influence of a party-spirit, and, if their labours are confined

fin'd to Christians of one denomination, their love and prayers are not limited within such narrow bounds, but extend to all who love and serve their Master; they have entered upon the ministry, not for low and fordid ends, for popular applause or filthy lucre, but from a constraining sense of the love of Jesus, and a just regard to the worth and danger of immortal souls; their zeal is conducted and modelled by the example and precepts of their Lord, their desire is not to destroy, but to save, and they wish their greatest enemies a participation in their choicest blessings; in the subject-matter and the manner of their preaching, they shew that they seek not to be men-pleasers, but to commend the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and when they have done their utmost, and when God has blessed their labours, and given them acceptance and success beyond their hopes, they are conscious of the defects and evils attending their best endeavours, of the weak influence the truths they preach to others have upon their own hearts, that their sufficiency of every kind is of God, and not of themselves, and therefore they sit down, ashamed, as unprofitable servants, and can rejoice or glory in nothing, but in Him who came into the world to save the chief of sinners.

It might be expected that a spirit and conduct, thus uniformly benevolent and disinterested, and witnessed to, in a greater or less degree, by the good effect of their ministry

and example amongst their hearers, would secure them the good-will of mankind, and entitle them to peace, if not to respect; but, on the contrary, these are the very people who are represented as deceivers of souls, and disturbers of society; they are not permitted to live in some places, and it is owing to a concurrence of favourable circumstances, if they are permitted to speak in any; the eyes of many are upon them, watching for their halting, their infirmities are aggravated, their expressions wrested, their endeavours counteracted, and their persons despised. The design of our history is to shew, in the course of every period of the church, that those who have approached nearest to the character I have^m attempted to delineate from St. Paul, have always met with such treatment; and from his declaration, that All who will liveⁿ godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, we may expect it will always be so, while human nature and the state of the world remain as they are. However, it may be a consolation to those who suffer for righteousness-sake, to reflect, that the apostles were treated thus before them, particularly St. Paul, who, as he laboured, so he suffered more abundantly than the

^m Our Lord's declaration, Behold I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves, is applicable to all his servants. The sight of a lamb is sufficient to provoke the rage and appetite of a wolf: thus the spirit of the gospel awakens the rage and opposition of the world; they have an antipathy to it, and owe it a grudge wherever they see it.

ⁿ 2 Tim. 3. 12.

the rest ; his person was treated with contempt and despite, his character traduced, his doctrine misrepresented, and tho' his natural and acquired abilities were great, and he spoke with power and the demonstration of the spirit, yet he was esteemed the filth and off-scouring of all things, a^o babler and a^p madman.

^o Acts 17. 18. ^p 2 Cor. 5. 13. See likewise Mark 3. 21. *And when his friends heard it they went out to lay hold of him, for they said, He is beside himself; that is to say, His attention to the office he has undertaken has transported him beyond the bounds of reason, and made him forget his station, his friends, and his safety, therefore, out of pure affection and prudence, they would have confined him: nor is it any wonder that our Lord's friends and relatives should thus think and speak of him, since we are assured that even his brethren did not believe on him. John 7. 3. And there seems to have been no possible medium. All who were conversant with him, must either receive him as the Messiah, or pity, if not despise him, as a madman. This was the mildest judgment they could form—the pharisees indeed went farther, and pronounced him an impostor and a devil. Such was the treatment our Lord and Master found: Let not then his disciples and servants be surprized or grieved that they are misrepresented and misunderstood, on account of their attachment to him, but let them comfort themselves with his gracious words. John 15. 18—21.*

C H A P. III.

Of the Irregularities and Offences which appeared in the Apostolic Churches.

THERE are few things in which the various divisions of professing Christians are so generally agreed, as in speaking highly and honourably of primitive Christianity. In many persons, this is no more than an ignorant admiration, not capable of distinguishing what is truly praise-worthy, but disposed to applaud every thing in the gross that has the sanction of antiquity to recommend it. The primitive Christians have been looked upon, by some, as if they were not men of the same nature and infirmities with ourselves, but nearly infallible and perfect: this is often taken for granted in general, and when particulars are insisted on, it is observable that they are seldom taken from the records of the New Testament, and the churches which flourished in the apostles times, but rather from those who lived in and after the second century, when a considerable deviation in doctrine, spirit and conduct, from those which were indeed the primitive churches, had already taken

taken place, and there were evident appearances of that curiosity, ambition and will-worship, which increased by a swift progress, till at length professed christianity degenerated into little more than an empty name.

If Christians of the early ages are supposed to have been more exemplary than in after-periods, chiefly because they lived nearer to the times of our Lord and his apostles, it will follow of course, that *the earlier the better*. We may then expect to find most of the Christian spirit among those who were converted and edified by the apostles personal ministry; and tho' we cannot allow the assumption (for the power of godliness depends not upon dates, periods, or instruments, but upon the influences of the Holy Spirit) yet we are content to join issue upon the conclusion, and are willing that all claims to a revival of religion, and a real reformation of manners, shall be admitted or rejected, as they accord or disagree with the accounts we have of the churches planted by the apostles, and during the time that these authorized ministers of Christ presided over them. We can find no other period, in which we can, to so much advantage, propose the visible churches of Christ as a pattern and specimen of what his grace and gospel may be expected to produce, in the present state of human nature; for the apostles were furnished, in an extraordinary manner, with zeal, wisdom, and authority for their work, and God was remarkably present with

with them, by the power of his spirit. Besides, as all the information we have, concerning this period, is derived from the inspired writings, we have that certainty of facts to ground our observations upon, which no other history can afford.

We have a pleasing description of the first of these churches, which was formed at Jerusalem soon after our Lord's ascension. On the day of Pentecost, many, who had personally consented to the death of Jesus, received power to believe in his name, and publicly joined themselves to his disciples: a sense of his love and grace to each, united the whole body so closely together, that, tho' they were a multitude of several thousands, it is said, They were of one heart and of one soul, neither said any of them, that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common; and they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. These were happy times indeed! No interfering interests or jarring sentiments, no subtle or factious spirits, no remissness in the means of grace, no instances of a conduct in any respect unbecoming the gospel, were to be found among them; it seemed as if the powerful sense of divine truths, which they had received, had overborne, if not extirpated, every evil disposition in so large an assembly: yet even this (the difference of numbers excepted)

excepted) is no peculiar case. The like has been observable again and again, when God has been pleased to honour ministers, far inferior to the apostles, with a sudden and signal influence, in places where the power of the gospel had been little known before. In such circumstances the truth has been often impressed and received with astonishing effects; many, who before were dead in trespasses and sins, having been, like those of old, pierced to the heart, and then filled with comfort, from a believing knowledge of him on whom their sins were laid, find themselves, as it were, in a new world; old things are past away; the objects of time and sense appear hardly worth their notice, the love of Christ constrains them, and they burn in love to all who will join them in praising their Saviour. Here indeed is a striking change wrought, yet the infirmities inseparable from human nature, tho' for the present overpowered, will, as occasions arise, discover themselves again, so far as to prove two things universally. 1. That the best of men are still liable to mistakes and weaknesses, for which they will have cause to mourn to the end of their lives. 2. That in the best times there will be some intruders, who, for a season, may make a profession, and yet, in the end, appear to have neither part nor lot in the matter. Thus it was in the church of Jerusalem; the pleasing state of things mentioned above did not continue very long; an Ananias and a Sapphira were soon found

found amongst them, who sought the praise of men, and made their profession a cloke for covetousness and hypocrisy^{*}; grudgings and murmurings arose in a little time between the Jews and the Hellenists^{*}; and it was not long before they were thrown into strong debates, and in danger of divisions, upon account of the question first started at Antioch, Whether the law of Moses was still in force to believers, or not?

In these later times, when it has been attempted to vindicate and illustrate a revival of religion, by appealing to the writings of St. Paul, and the delineation he has given us of the faith and practice of a Christian, the attempt has often excited disdain; it has been thought a sufficient answer, to enumerate and exaggerate the faults, mistakes and inconsistencies (or what the world is pleased to account such) that are charged upon the persons concerned in such an appeal, as necessarily proving that, where these blemishes are found, there can be no resemblance to the first Christians. If the frequency did not lessen the wonder, it might seem very unaccountable that any person, who has read the New Testament, should venture upon this method in a protestant country, where the people have the scripture in their hands, and are at liberty to judge for themselves. But as there are not a few, even among protestants, who seem to expect their assertions will pass for proofs, I propose, in this

^{*} Acts 6.

^{*} Acts 15.

this chapter, to point out several things, which, tho' undoubtedly wrong, had a considerable prevalence among the first Christians, leaving the application to the judicious reader. I acknowledge my firm persuasion that a certain system of doctrine, revived of late years, is the doctrine of the Reformation, and of the New Testament, which, tho' not suited to the general and prevailing taste, is attended, more or less, with the blessing and power of God, in turning sinners from darkness to light; I confess that both ministers and people, who espouse this despised cause, have sufficient ground for humiliation; we have seen, we still see, many things amongst us which we cannot approve, we fear that too many are a real discredit to the cause they profess, and we are conscious that the best of us fall mournfully short of what might be expected from the sublime principles which, by the grace of God, we have been taught from his word; we desire to be open to conviction, not to contend for errors, or even to *vindicate* any thing that can be proved contrary to the scripture; but if some things not justifiable, which we must own have accompanied what we verily believe to be a work of the Spirit of God, are (as some would represent them) sufficient to discredit this work, to impeach the truth of the doctrines or the sincerity of the instruments in the gross—Then we are sure it will follow, upon the same principles, that the Jews and Heathens had just ground and warrant to reject
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the doctrine of the apostles, and to treat their persons with contempt.

A competent knowledge and consideration of the present state of man, in himself, and of the circumstances in which he is placed, are necessary to preserve us from being offended with the gospel of Christ, on account of the imperfections that may be found in the conduct of those who have sincerely received it; due allowances must be made for the remains of ignorance and prejudice, the power of habit, temper and constitution, in different persons. The various combinations of these, and other particulars, make each individual character, tho' agreeing in one common nature, and influenced by the same general principles, in some respects an original. The power and subtlety of Satan, and his address in suiting his temptations to the peculiar inclinations and situation of every person, must be taken into the account; and likewise the immense variety of occasions arising from without, such as, the provocations and arts of enemies, the influence of mistaken friends, the necessary engagements, connections and relations of common life, the artifices of seducers, and the scandals of false professors. These things, and others which might be named, concur to make the path of duty exceeding difficult, especially to young beginners, who, so soon as they become sincerely desirous to serve the Lord, find themselves immediately in the midst of scenes, in which

which they can only be fitted to act their parts aright by a gradual and painful experience. They whose intentions are right, usually set out with warm hearts and sanguine expectations, little aware of the difficulties that are before them; they have indeed a sure rule to act by in the scripture, and they have a sure promise, that the Spirit of God will be their guide and teacher; but at first they have but little acquaintance with the scripture, and, till they are humbled by being left to commit many mortifying mistakes, they are too prone to lean to their own understandings; every day brings them into some new difficulty, wherein they can get little direction from what they have passed thro' before, and often emergencies are so pressing as hardly to leave room for deliberation: in short, it seems to be the Lord's pleasure, not so much to preserve them from mistakes and indiscretions at first, as to take occasion to humble them upon this account, and to shew them how to correct them when made. Thus they are more confirmed in a sense of their own weakness and of his goodness, and are trained up, by time, observation and repeated trials, to a more perfect exercise of every branch of Christian wisdom; by degrees their judgments are formed to greater maturity, they are more jealous of themselves, more acquainted with Satan's devices, more capable of distinguishing the spirit and conduct of mankind, and especially more simply dependent upon God for his teaching

and direction : and thus they grow into a participation of the spirit of the gospel, and are enabled to act and speak as becomes the servants of Christ. When his gospel is faithfully preached and cordially received, there always will be some who are able, by the grace of God, to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and to demean themselves so that, if any will speak evil of them, the shame is retorted upon themselves ; but among the numbers who are forming in the same school, there will likewise be some (for the reasons I have suggested) whose conduct will, in some respects, be liable to censure, tho' their hearts are sincere, and there will frequently be others who (like the hearers compared by our Lord to seed sown upon rocky ground) will thrust themselves amongst professors, be called by the same name, and accounted by the world the same people, who at length discover themselves to be meer hypocrites. These indeed will furnish occasion enough for exception, and they who are glad to have it so, will readily suppose or pretend that they are all alike. It remains to shew that, in this sense, there is no new thing under the sun. It was so from the beginning.

The apostle Paul bears an honourable testimony to the sincerity, zeal and grace of the believers amongst whom he had preached, and to whom he had written ; he commends their work of faith and labour of love ; he styles them his joy, his glory, and his crown,
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and expresses his confidence that the Lord, who had begun a good work in them, would assuredly compleat it: but tho' he knew there were many persons among them, who were well established in the truth, and judicious in their conduct, his admonitions upon several occasions shew there were others, whose judgments were weak, and behaviour unwarrantable.

He speaks of the Corinthians^t as a people enriched in the knowledge of Christ, and honoured with an eminency of gifts, yet he takes notice of many things blameable in them; in-
somuch that, if the people who now censure appearances of a religious kind, because they are not wholly free from imperfection, could have had opportunity to judge of the Christians at Corinth in the same spirit, it is probable they would have despised and condemned those whom the apostle loved, as much as they can possibly do any set of people now.

They had first received the gospel from St. Paul, but it had been confirmed to them afterwards by other ministers. The servants of Christ all preach the same truths, but the Holy Spirit, who furnishes them all for the work he appoints them to, distributes to each one severally, according to his own will; he communicates a diversity of gifts, not all to one person, but each has a talent given him to profit withal; one is favoured with a peculiar insight into the mysteries of the gospel, another

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has a power and pathos of expression, and another is happy in a facility of applying to distressed and wounded consciences. It is the duty and privilege of Christians to avail themselves of these different talents, to profit by each, to be thankful for all, and to esteem every faithful minister very highly for his work-sake. But the Corinthians were unduely influenced by personal attachments, as their several inclinations led them; they formed imprudent comparisons and preferences, were divided into parties, and drawn into contentions upon this account, one saying, I am of Paul, another, I am of Apollos, or I of Cephas; they thought it a mark of zeal to be strenuous for their respective favourites: but St. Paul assured them that it was a sign they were weak and low in the Christian life, and a means to keep them so. Disputes and prepossessions of this kind draw the mind away from its proper nourishment, and afford occasion for the various workings of our selfish passions. Wherever the Lord is pleased to raise up, in or near the same place, Ministers who are of eminence in their different gifts, the effects of this spirit will be more or less observable, and it is eagerly observed by the world, and amplified to the utmost, as a weighty objection; the Ministers are represented to be artful designing men, who, under the sacred names of Christ and the gospel, are aiming chiefly or solely to form a party of dependents

pendents upon themselves; and the people are accounted silly sheep, carried away captive by the influence of their popular leaders, inso-much that they cannot, or dare not, receive the doctrines they profess to love, from any but their own favourites. The disposition is certainly wrong, but let it be censured with candour, not as the peculiarity of this or that party, but as a fault which human nature is always prone to in a similar circumstance: it shew'd a want of solid judgment in the Corinthians, but was no impeachment of their sincerity, much less did it prove that Paul, Apollos or Cephas, were mercenary ambitious men, who prostituted their talents and influence to gain disciples to themselves, rather than to Christ. The same premises will admit of no stronger conclusion now than in the apostles days.

The proper design and tendency of the religion of Jesus is, to wean the affections from the world, to mortify the dictates of self-love, and to teach us (by his example) to be gentle, forbearing, benevolent and disinterested. This the world is aware of, and tho' they declare their dislike to the principles which alone can produce such a spirit, they always expect it from the people who profess them; and therefore when, amongst the numbers of these, they can find a few instances of persons too much actuated by selfish, worldly or angry tempers, it is eagerly objected, These are excellent people, if you would judge of them by

the length and frequency of their devotions, and by what they have to say of their persuasion of God's love to them; but touch them in their property, and they shew themselves as unwilling to forego, and as anxious to grasp the good things of this world, as if they had no better claim to heaven than ourselves. It is much to be lamented that such occasions of reproach are afforded to those who seek them. But what would they have said of the Corinthians whom the apostle reproves in the following terms^w: Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another: Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, you do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren! And, in the preceding chapter, he speaks of an enormity among them hardly to be heard of among the heathens, which, tho' the fault of one person, brought dishonour upon them all, because they had not explicitly disowned it, and proceeded against the offender. This is not to be wondered at, for we have often seen, in our own time, that tho' evil practices have been censured in the strongest terms of disallowance, and the offenders publicly and notoriously disclaimed, yet many will still be so destitute of candour and equity as to insist on it, They are all alike.

The irregularities in the public worship at Corinth were such as, if practised amongst ourselves,

^w 1 Cor. 6. 7, 8.

ourselves, would excite a greater clamour than any thing of that nature which has been hitherto complained of. It appears that, far from conducting their assemblies with decency and order, they were sometimes in the greatest confusion: different persons had a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation, many speaking together, and sometimes in different languages; so that the apostle thought it very probable that, if an unbeliever came in amongst them, he would of course say, They were mad^x. And this want of decorum extended to their celebration of the Lord's supper, where, says the apostle, Every one taketh before another, and one is hungry, and another is drunken^y. I apprehend that these instances of disorder cannot be paralleled by the most irregular proceedings in our time, amongst any people that hold the principles which I am at present engaged to vindicate.

Many of the Corinthians, as well as the Galatians^z, had discovered great unsteadiness

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towards

^x 1 Cor. 14. 23.

^y 1 Cor. 11. 21.

^z Yet he says of the Galatians, that when he first went among them, they received him as an angel of God, and if possible, would have plucked out their own eyes to have given them to him, Gal. 4. 15. Great is the power of the gospel, it subdues and possesses the heart, and conciliates a tenderness and relation between ministers and people, nearer and dearer than the ties of flesh and blood. But alas, how great likewise is the inconstancy of mortals! the apostle experienced it to his grief, and where he had the greatest prospect, he was most disappointed; those who once would have

towards St. Paul, and had been seduced by false teachers and pretended apostles. Inexperienced minds are very liable to such deceptions ; meaning well themselves, they are too apt to listen to the fair words and fine speeches of those who lie in wait to deceive. The love of Christ and the love of holiness are the leading properties of a gracious heart; and such an one, till experience has made him wise, conceives a good opinion of all who profess a regard for Jesus, or for sanctification ; he is not aware at first, that there are those in the world who attempt to divide what God has joined together. When the blood and righteousness of Christ are recommended, not as the source, but as a substitute for vital experimental religion, or when some other spirit is preached than that whose office it is to testify of Jesus, in either case the food of the soul is poisoned, and the evil begins to operate before it is perceived. Faithful ministers are accounted too low or too high, too strict or too remiss, according to the scheme newly adopted ; they are first disregarded, and at length considered as enemies, because they persist in the truth, and refuse to suit themselves to the new taste of their hearers. Thus error, once admitted, makes an alarming progress, and no power but that of God can stop

have plucked out their own eyes for his service, afterwards accounted him their enemy, for telling them the truth. We need not therefore wonder if there are instances of this kind at present.

stop it. Hence proceed divisions, sub-divisions, distinctions, refinements, bitterness, strife^a, envyings, and by degrees enthusiasm, in the worst sense of the word : an evil to be dreaded and guarded against no less earnestly than the beginning of a fire or a pestilence. Such trying circumstances will demonstrate who are indeed upon the right foundation, for others, having once begun, depart from the truth, grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived; and many who are built upon the rock, and therefore cannot be totally or finally drawn away, yet suffer unspeakable loss : the wood, hay and stubble^b, the unadvised additions they have admitted to the scriptural truths they once received, are burnt up in the time of temptation; they lose much of their comfort and stability, and have in a manner all to begin again. The world, that knows not the weakness of man, or the power and devices of Satan, laughs at those things, and expects to see them issue in a universal confusion, like that of Babel. In the same light it is most probable the heathens beheld and derided the primitive Christians, for they likewise had
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^a That bitterness and strife were too frequent in the primitive churches, appears from James 3. 14. Gal. 5. 15. and other texts. Our Lord's admonition, Matt. 7. 3—5. has always been too little regarded; and few are yet sufficiently convinced of the folly and absurdity of pointing out, and in an angry spirit condemning, the mistakes and faults of others, while we indulge greater in ourselves. Reformation (like modern charity) should begin at home!

^b 1 Cor. 3. 10—15.

their shaking and sifting times; many amongst them, who seemed to begin in the spirit, were stopped short in their course by the arts of false teachers, to their great hindrance, and some to their final overthrow.

St. Paul addresses no one church in terms of greater tenderness and approbation than the Thessalonians; he commends their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus, and mentions them as a pattern to the other churches in Macedonia and Greece. Yet even among these he understood there were some who walked disorderly, and were busy bodies, not working at all: he strongly disapproved their conduct, declaring, that if any would not work, neither should he eat^c. When persons are newly awakened to a concern for their souls, and deeply impressed with the importance of eternity, it is no wonder (considering the animal frame) if their attention is so engaged and engrossed for a season, that they cannot attend to the affairs of common life with their usual alacrity and freedom^d: if their concern is of a right kind, they are gradually

^c 2 Thess. 3. 10, 11.

^d See James 4. 9. The word *κατὰφρα*, rendered *heaviness*, answers nearest to *dejection*; the derivation importing a downcast countenance, and it expresses that kind of sorrow which sinks the spirits and fixes the eyes upon the earth. Something of this is usually discernable when a real conviction of sin takes place in the heart. The inspired apostle recommends this temper and demeanour, as most suitable to the case of sinners who are destitute of faith and love, and cannot therefore rejoice upon good grounds; and yet,
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gradually brought to peace and hope in believing; they recover their spirits, and their civil callings being now sanctified by a desire to glorify God in them, their diligence is not less, but frequently greater than before; for now they act not to please men, or to please themselves, but what they do, they do heartily as to the Lord. However, amongst a number of people, natural temper, indiscretion, or inadvertence may cause some to deviate from the general rule; and tho' we cannot justify any who are remiss in the discharge of the relative duties of society, we may justify the doctrines and principles they acknowledge from the charge of leading them into this mistake, unless it can be proved that St. Paul's preaching was justly chargeable with the same fault.

But these are small things, compared to what he says in another place. He complains to the Philippians in this affecting language^e—Many walk (not some only, but many) of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ^f; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, who mind earthly things.

when any person begins to be impressed in this manner, and to see the propriety of the apostle's advice, it frequently happens that all who know him, both friends and enemies, will agree to pronounce him, Disorder'd in his senses. So different, so opposite are the spirit of God and the spirit of the world!

^e Phil. 3. 18, 19. ^f What disagreeable things the apostle was apprehensive of meeting, when he should revisit Corinth, we may learn from 2 Cor. 12. 20, 21.

things. St. Paul had occasion to express himself thus, and that again and again, even in the golden days of primitive christianity. Could their worst enemies have given them a worse character? Can even malice itself desire to fix a harsher imputation upon any denomination of people now subsisting? Yet these are the words of truth and soberness, the words of an inspired apostle, the words, not of resentment, but grief; he spoke of it weeping; he would willingly have hoped better things; but he knew what tempers and practices were inconsistent with a sincere acceptance of the gospel, and, unless he would shut his eyes and stop his ears, he could not but be sensible that many, who were reputed Christians, dishonoured the name of christianity, and caused the ways of truth to be evil spoken of. Now what is the consequence? Shall the apostle bear the blame* of the evils and abominations he lamented? for if he had not preached, these evils would not have appeared under the Christian name. Shall the wickedness of his pretended

* The apostle knew that some did or would presume to infer a liberty to sin from the doctrine which he preached, Rom. 6. 1. yet he would not suppress or disguise the truths of God to prevent such a poor disingenuous perversion: he knew likewise that no one, who had tasted that the Lord is gracious, can either form such a conclusion himself, or listen to it if proposed by others, therefore he thought it unnecessary to refute it at large. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! This is a sufficient answer. This absurd blasphemy exposes and confutes itself; the terms are inconsistent, impossible, and contradictory in the highest degree.

tended followers be charged as the necessary effect of that pure and heavenly doctrine which he had delivered? By no means. The grace of God, which he preached, taught and enabled those, who received it in their hearts, to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world. If enquiry was made concerning the tendency of his doctrine, he could appeal to the tempers and lives of multitudes^h, who had been thereby delivered from the love and power of sin, and filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. But it was likewise true that they were still encumbered with a depraved nature, they were in a world full of temptations and snares, and as their numbers were very great, some instances had occurred of persons sincerely well disposed, who had too visibly declined from the rule by which they professed and desired to walk. Against their mistakes and faults he watchfully directed his exhortations and admonitions, as occasions offered, and they were generally attended with a good effect, to convince, humble, and restore the offendersⁱ, and to increase their circumspection for the time to come. It was true likewise, that there were some gathered by the preaching of the gospel into the number of professors, who were not effectually called and changed by the spirit of God. These, tho' for a time they had a name

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^h 2 Cor. 3. 2, 3.ⁱ 2 Cor. 7. 9.

to live, were no better than dead: and one reason why the Lord permitted the offences and divisions we have mentioned to take place was, that, by the means of such heresies, those that were approved might be made manifest, and the chaff separated from the wheat; for tho' the ignorant world would call even those persons Christians, whose conduct proved them enemies to the cross of Christ, yet time, the test of truth, unanswerably evinced the difference. Thus St. John, who lived some years after the rest of the apostles, and saw many turn their backs upon the teachers and doctrines they had once owned, has observed to this purpose—They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us^k. In a word, there were too many pretenders, some things amiss where the heart and views were right in the main, and imperfections in the best; the scorers and cavillers, who hated the light of the gospel, and were always in search of something to confirm their prejudices against it, met with much answerable to their wishes, even in the first and best churches; but to men of candour, who were ingenuous seekers of the truth, the spirituality, humility and brotherly love that prevailed among the Christians, and the powerful effects of their public ordinances, demonstrated that the truth was

^k 1 John 2, 19.

was on their side, and that God was assuredly with them.

We offer the same apology, the same train of reasoning, in behalf of what is now so generally deemed the foolishness of preaching. The doctrines we defend, which some (who cannot do it ignorantly) have the effrontery to misrepresent as novel opinions, are, we doubt not, the doctrines of Christ and his apostles, and in substance the doctrines taught from the word of God, by Wickliff, Luther, and the venerable reformers of our own church. We preach Christ crucified, Christ the end of the law for righteousness, and the power of God for sanctification, to every one that believeth: we preach salvation by grace thro' faith in his blood, and we are sure that they who receive this doctrine unfeignedly, will, by their lives and conversations, demonstrate it to be a doctrine according to godliness; they are not indeed delivered from infirmities, they are liable to mistakes and indiscretions, and see more amiss in themselves than their worst enemies can charge them with: but sin is their burden, they sigh to be delivered from it, and they expect a compleat redemption. We cannot indeed say so much for all who outwardly avow a belief of this doctrine; there are pretenders, who, while they profess to believe in God, in works they deny him: but it has been so from the beginning. The miscarriages of such persons are charged indiscriminately upon the societies among whom they
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are mixed, and upon the truths which they seem to approve : but there is a righteous God, who in due time will vindicate his own gospel and his own people from all aspersions. St. Paul observed such things in his day, and he spoke of them likewise, but he spoke of them *weeping*. The true state of the mind may be determined from the temper with which the miscarriages of professors are observed ; the profane expatiate on them with delight, the self-righteous with disdain, but they who know themselves, and love the Lord, cannot speak of them without the sincerest emotions of grief ; they are concerned for the honour of the gospel, which is defamed under this pretence, they are grieved for the unhappy and dangerous state of those by whom such offences come, and they fear for themselves, lest the enemy should gain an advantage over them likewise, for they know they have no strength nor goodness of their own, therefore, avoiding unnecessary reflections on others, they endeavour to maintain a watchful jealousy over themselves, and to fix their hearts and hopes upon Christ Jesus their Lord, who, they are persuaded, is able to keep them from falling, to save them to the uttermost, and at length to present them, faultless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

C H A P. IV.

*Of the Heresies propagated by false Teachers in
the Apostles Days.*

THE parables in the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew are prophetical of the reception and event of the gospel in succeeding ages. In this view our Lord himself has explained them. Wherever it is preached, the hearers may be classed according to the distribution in the parable of the Sower: some hear without understanding or reflection; in some it excites a hasty emotion in the natural affections, and produces an observable and sudden change in their conduct, resembling the effects of a real conversion to God, but the truth not being rooted in the heart, nor the soul united to Christ by a living faith, these hopeful appearances are sooner or later blasted and come to nothing: others are really convinced in their judgment of the truth and importance of what they hear, but their hearts cleave to the dust, and the love of this world, the care of what they have, the desire of what they have not, the calls of business, or the solicitations of pleasure, choak the word which
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they seem to receive, so that it brings forth no fruit to perfection : a part however (usually the smallest part) who are compared to the good ground, are disposed and enabled, by divine grace, to receive it thankfully, as life from the dead ; and tho' they meet with many difficulties, and, like the corn upon the ground, pass thro' a succession of trying and changing seasons, yet having the love, promise and power of God engaged on their behalf, in defiance of frosts, and blasts, and storms, they are brought to maturity, and, when fully ripe, are safely gathered into his garner¹. This is an epitome of the ecclesiastical history of every nation, and of every parish, to which this word of salvation is sent^m.

But the parable of the taresⁿ teaches us farther to expect, that besides the general influence which Satan, as the god of this world, will exert to blind the eyes of mankind, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine upon them, he will take occasion, from the knowledge of the truth, to insinuate a variety of errors. His first attempts in this way are often so specious and unsuspected, that they are compared to a man's sowing seed by stealth and in the night, but, as the corn grew, a large crop of tares springing up with it, demonstrated that an enemy had been there. This, in fact, has been universally the case, in every country and age where the gospel has been received ; and we may remark,

¹ Mat. 3. 12.^m Mat. 13. 25, 28.ⁿ 2 Cor. 4. 4.

mark, that the sowing the good seed was the occasion of the tares being cast into the same ground. When a people are involved in gross darkness and ignorance, sleeping in a false peace, and buried in the pleasures and pursuits of the world, they have neither leisure nor inclination to invent or attend to novelties in religion, each one is satisfied with that form (if even the form of godliness is retained) which he has received from his parents, and neither pretends or desires to be wiser than those who went before him; but when the truth has shone forth and been received, and seems to bid fair for farther success, Satan employs all his power and subtlety, either to suppress or counterfeit it, or both. Much has been done in the former way; he has prevailed so far as to enkindle the fiercest animosities against the nearest relatives, and persuaded men that they might do acceptable service to God, by punishing his faithful servants with torture, fire and sword^o: and no less industrious and successful has he been in practising upon the passions and prejudices of mankind to admit and propagate, instead of the gospel of Christ, and under that name, an endless diversity of opinions, utterly incompatible with it; of these, some are ingenious and artful, adapted to gratify the pride of those who are wise in their own conceits; others more gross and extravagant, suited to enflame the imaginations, or to gratify the appetites of such

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persons

^o John 16. 2.

persons as have not a turn for speculation and refinement.

As these appearances have always accompanied the gospel, so they have always been a stumbling-block and offence to the world, and have furnished those who hated the light with a pretext for rejecting it; and the doctrines of truth have been charged as the source and cause of those errors, which have only sprung from their abuse and perversion. When popery, for a series of ages, detained mankind in darkness and bondage, and deprived them of the knowledge of the holy scriptures, the tide of error ran uniformly in one great channel; when dead works were substituted in the place of living faith, and the worship and trust, which is only due to Jesus the great Mediator, was blasphemously directed to subordinate intercessors, to angels and to saints, whether real or pretended; when forgiveness of sin was expected, not by the blood of Christ, but by penances, pilgrimages, masses, and human absolutions, by the repetition of many prayers, or the payment of sums of money — while things continued thus, the world was generally in that state of stupidity and blind security, which is miscalled religious peace and uniformity, and the controversies of the times were chiefly confined to those points which immediately affected the power, wealth or pre-eminence of the several religious orders by whom the people were implicitly led; some differences of opinion were indeed known,

known, but the charge of heresy and dangerous innovations was seldom so much as pretended against any, but the few who refused to wear the mark of the beast upon their right-hands and foreheads, and who, by the mercy of God, retained and professed the main truths of christianity in some degree of power and purity. But when it pleased God to revive the knowledge of the gospel, by the ministry of Luther and his associates, and many were turned from darkness to light, the enemy of mankind presently changed his methods, and, by his influence, the sowing of the good seed was followed by tares in abundance; in the course of a few years the glory of the Reformation was darkened, and its progress obstructed, by the enthusiasm and infatuation of men, who, under a pretence of improving upon Luther's plan, propagated the wildest, most extravagant and blasphemous opinions, and perpetrated (under the mask of religion) such acts of cruelty, villainy and licentiousness, as have been seldom heard of in the world. The Papists beheld these excesses with pleasure: many of them could not but know that Luther, and the heads of the Reformation, did all that could be expected from them, to shew the folly and iniquity of such proceedings; but, against the light of truth and fact, they laboured to persuade the world, that these were the necessary consequences of Luther's doctrine, and that no better issue could be justly hoped for when

men presumed to depart from the authorized standards of popes and councils, and to read and examine the scripture for themselves.

This religious madness was, however, of no long duration ; the people who held tenets inconsistent with the peace of society, were deservedly treated as rebels and incendiaries by the governing powers, the ringleaders were punished, and the multitudes dispersed ; their most obnoxious errors were gradually abandoned, and are now in a manner forgot. After the peace of Passau, the Reformation acquired an establishment in Germany and other places ; and since that time, error has assumed a milder form, and has been supported by softer methods, and more respectable names.

In our own country the same spirit of enthusiasm and disorder has appeared at different times (tho' it has been restrained, by the providence of God, from proceeding to the same extremities) and has been most notorious, when, or soon after, the power of gospel truth has been most eminently revived ; for (as I have already observed) when religion is upon the decline, and only so much of a profession retained as is consistent with the love of the present world, and a conformity to the maxims and practices of the many, we seldom hear of any errors prevailing, but such as will find a favourable toleration, and may be avowed without exciting very strong and general expressions of contempt and ill-will against those
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who maintain them. But whenever real religion, as a life of faith in the Son of God, is set forth upon the principles of scripture, and by the operation of the Holy Spirit witnesses are raised up, who, by their conduct, demonstrate that they are crucified with Christ, to the law, to sin, and to the world, then is the time for Satan to discredit this work, by imposing a variety of false views and appearances upon the minds of the ignorant and unwary, and he is seldom at a loss for fit instruments to promote his designs. Since the late revival of the Reformation doctrines amongst us, we have, perhaps, fewer things of this kind to apologize for, than have been observable on any similar occasion; and the best apology we can offer for what has been really blameable, is, to shew that it was even thus in the apostles days—and that, if any arguments taken from these blemishes are conclusive against what some chuse to call the novel doctrines now, they would, with equal reason, conclude against the validity of the New Testament.

And not to confine myself to such things as the world is most prone to except against, I shall endeavour to shew that the seeds of all errors and heresies, the fashionable, as well as those which are more generally despised, were sown in the first age, and appeared so early as to give occasion for the apostles censures against them. I do not mean by this, to parallel every name and every singularity that a subtle

head or a warm imagination may have started, but to assign, in general, the principles to which all these delusions may be reduced, the sources to which these inebriating and dangerous streams may be traced; for indeed the operations of the human mind seem to be much more simple and limited than we are ordinarily aware. As there can be no new truths, tho' every truth appears new to us which we have not known before, so it is probable that there can be now no new errors; at least it is certain that a competent knowledge of antiquity, or even a careful perusal of the apostles writings, will furnish sufficient evidence, that some modern authors and teachers are, by no means, the inventors of the ingenious schemes they have presented to the public. Truth, like the sun, maintains a constant course; every thing would stagnate and die if we were deprived of it for a single day: but errors are like comets, which, tho' too excentric to be subject exactly to our computations, yet have their periods of approach and recess, and some of them have appeared and been admired, have been withdrawn and forgot, over and over again.

Error, in the simplest form, is a misapprehension of the truth. Some part of the gospel must be known before any erroneous conceptions of it can take place. Thus we read^p that Simon Magus was struck with Philip's preaching, and the effects which attended it: he was
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^p Acts 8. 9—22.

so far impressed, that it is said, he believed, that is, he made a profession of faith; he was convinced there was something extraordinary in the doctrine, but he understood it not, and the event shewed he had no part nor lot in the matter. He is thought, by the ancients, to have been the founder of that capital sect, which is known in general by the name of the Gnostics, and which, like a gangrene, spread far and wide, in various branches and subdivisions, each successive head refining upon the system of the preceding. In Sir Peter King's History of the Apostle's Creed, and Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, the English reader may see the substance of the figments which these unhappy men, wise in their own conceit, vented under the name of the Christian religion.

The doctrine of Jesus Christ, and of him crucified, which St. Paul preached, and in which he gloried, is the pillar and ground of truth, the rock upon which the church is built, and against which the gates of hell shall never prevail^a. Mistakes in this point are fundamental, dangerous, and, if persisted in, destructive; for, as such a knowledge of God as is connected with his favour and communion, is eternal life, so none can come to the Father but by the Son^b, nor can any know him, but those to whom the Son will reveal him^c. On this account Satan's great endeavour

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^a 1 Cor. 2. 2. Gal. 6. 14. 1 Tim. 3. 15. Mat. 16. 18.

^b John 17. 3. and 14. 6.

^c Mat. 11. 27.

(and on his success herein the strength of his kingdom depends) is to darken and pervert the minds of men, lest they should acknowledge and understand what the scripture declares of his person, characters and offices, as well knowing that if these are set aside, whatever else is left of religion will be utterly unavailing. Jesus Christ is revealed in the scripture, and was preached by his first disciples, as God manifest in the flesh, a divine person in the human nature, who, by submitting to ignominy, pain and death, made a full and proper atonement for sin, and wrought out an everlasting righteousness in favour of all who should believe in his name; and he is set forth in that nature, in which he suffered, as the object of our supreme love, trust and adoration. Other important doctrines, largely insisted on in the word of God, such as the demerit of sin, the obnoxiousness of sinners to punishment, and the misery and incapacity of man in his fallen state, are closely connected with this, and cannot be satisfactorily explained without it. The necessary method of our recovery exhibits the most striking view of the ruin in which sin has involved us, and is the only adequate standard whereby to estimate the unspeakable love of God, manifested in our redemption. On the other hand, a knowledge of the true state of mankind, in consequence of the fall, is necessary to obviate the prejudices of our minds against a procedure which, tho' in itself the triumph of Divine Wisdom,

Wisdom, is in many respects contradictory to our natural (and therefore false) notions of the fitness of things. St. Paul declares ^tthat the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, neither can he discern them; and in another place ^u, That no man can say (that is, sincerely and upon solid conviction) that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. To worship him who had been hanged upon a cross, and to expect eternal happiness from his death, was to the Jews a stumbling-block: it offended their notions of the unity of the godhead, and opposed their high esteem of their own righteousness; and to the Greeks or Heathens, it appeared the greatest folly and absurdity imaginable. For these reasons the gospel was rejected by multitudes as soon as proposed, and those who preached it were accounted babblers and madmen, not because they were at a loss for propriety of expression, or discovered any thing ridiculous in their conduct, but because they enforced tenets which were adjudged inconsistent with the common-sense of mankind.

But notwithstanding these prejudices, the energy of their preaching, and the miraculous powers with which it was accompanied, made an impression upon many persons, so far as to induce them to profess the name of Jesus, tho' they were not spiritually enlightened into the mysteries of his religion, nor their hearts thoroughly subdued to the obedience of the faith.

^t 1 Cor. 2. 14

^u 1 Cor. 12. 3.

faith. There are other points, within the compass of the gospel ministry, more adapted to affect the minds of men in their natural state. Few are so hardened but they have a conscience of sin, some fears with respect to its consequences, and a pre-intimation of immortality. Such are capable of being greatly affected and moved, by a pathetic declaration of the terrors of the Lord, the solemnities of a future judgment, the joys of heaven, or the torments of hell. We cannot doubt that these topics, when insisted on with that strength of argument and warmth of spirit, of which the apostles were capable, would engage the attention of many who were not partakers of that divine light, by which alone the whole scheme of truth, in its harmony and beauty, can be perceived. The seed sown upon the rock sprang up immediately, the quickness of its growth, and the suddenness of its decay, proceeding from the same cause, a want of depth in the soil. Not a few of these hasty believers presently renounced the faith altogether, and others, who went not so far as to disown the name, endeavoured to accommodate the doctrine to their pre-possessions, and to explain or reject what they could not understand, in such a manner as to form a system upon the whole agreeable to their own wills. Men of corrupt and prejudiced minds thus tampered with the truth, and their inventions, when made known, were adopted by others of the same cast of thought: as they were differently

differently inclined, they directed their enquiries to different points, and each found partizans and adherents in their respective ways. Thus errors, and, in consequence, sects and divisions, were multiplied ; for when men depart from the unerring guidance of God's word, there is no end of their imaginations, one singularity produces another, and every new leader is stimulated to carry his discoveries farther than those who have gone before him. Farther, as human nature is universally the same, we may judge, from what we have seen, that there always have been persons inclined to join in a religious profession, from the unworthy motives of worldly interest, and a desire to stand fair with their fellow-creatures. Temptations to this were not so strong indeed at first, nor so general as they have often been since, yet the force of friendship, relation, (and when christianity had been of some years standing) education, custom and human authority is very considerable ; nor is even persecution a sufficient bar against hypocrites and intruders. They who suffer for the gospel, tho' despised by the world, are highly esteemed and considered by their own side ; it procures them an attention which they would not have otherwise obtained ; it may give them an importance in their own eyes, furnish them with something to talk of, and make them talked of by others. There are people who, for the sake of these advantages, will for a season venture

ture upon many hardships, tho', when the trial comes very close, they will not endure to the end. In a word, there is no reason to doubt but that amongst the numbers who professed the gospel at first, there would be found the same variety of tempers, circumstances, views and motives, as have ordinarily appeared amongst a great number of people, suddenly formed in any other period of time; and the apostle's writings prove that it was really so. From these general principles, we may easily account for the early introduction and increase of errors and heresies, and that they should be in a manner the same as have sprung up with, or followed, succeeding revivals of the truth. Nor is it just cause of surprize, if sincere Christians have been, in some instances, entangled in the prevailing errors of the times: designing no harm themselves, they suspect none, and are therefore liable to be imposed on by those who lie in wait to deceive^w.

When Christianity first appeared, the heathen wisdom, known by the name of Philosophy, was in the highest repute: it had two principal branches, the Grecian and the Eastern. The former admitted (at least did not condemn) a multiplicity and subordination of deities, amongst whom, as agents and mediators between their supreme Jupiter and mortals, the care and concerns of mankind were

^w Ephes. 4. 14.

were subdivided, to each of which homage and sacrifices were due: their mythology, or the pretended history of their divinities, was puerile and absurd, and many of their religious rites inconsistent with the practice of public decorum and good morals. Some of the philosophers endeavoured to guard against the worst abuses, and to form a system of religion and morality, in which they seem to have proceeded as far as could be expected from men who were totally ignorant of the true God, and of their own state: some truths they were acquainted with, truths in theory, but utterly impracticable upon any principles but those of revelation. Amongst a vast number of opinions concerning the chief good of man, a few held, that man's honour and happiness must consist in conformity to and communion with God; but how to attain these desirable ends, they were entirely ignorant.

The Eastern philosophy was solemn and mysterious, not less fabulous than the other, but the fables were of a graver cast; it seemed to mourn under the sense of moral evil, and laboured in vain to account for its entrance; its precepts were gloomy and severe, and a perfect course of bodily mortification was recommended as the great expedient to purify the soul from all its defilements, and to re-unite it, by degrees, to its great Author.

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St. Paul, in several passages^x, cautions the Christians against corrupting the simplicity of their faith, by admitting the reasonings and inventions of vain men. In some places^y he seems to speak more directly of the Gnostics, whose heresies were little more than the fables of the Eastern philosophy in a new dress, with an acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as an extraordinary person, yet so as utterly to exclude and deny all the important truths revealed in scripture concerning him; they dignified their scheme with the name of Gnosis, or Science, but it was falsely so called, and stood in direct opposition to the gospel. On other occasions^z he appears to have had the Grecian philosophy chiefly in view. But notwithstanding his admonitions, it was not long before the errors of philosophy had an ill influence upon the professors of the Christian faith; and even several of the fathers darkened the glory of the truth, by endeavouring to accommodate it to the taste and genius of that heathen wisdom which they had before admired, and still thought might be useful to embellish and recommend the gospel.

But, to confine myself to the apostles times, it is plain, from the epistles of St. Paul, John, Jude and Peter^a, that many false prophets and teachers had, in their days, crept in, who

^x Coloss. 2. 8. 1 Tim. 6. 20. ^y 1 Tim. 1. 4. Tit. 3. 9.

^z Rom. 1. 21—23. 1 Cor. 1. 20—23.

^a Titus 1. 10. 1 John 4. 1. 2 Pet. 2. 18, 19. Jude 4.

who propagated damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, turning the grace of God into licentiousness, speaking great swelling words of vanity, boasting themselves of freedom while they were in bondage to their own lusts. And in the epistle to the church of Ephesus^b, our Lord himself mentions a sect who bore the name of Nicolaitans, and expresses his disapprobation of them in those awful terms, *Whom I also hate*. The peculiar tenets of the people condemned in these passages of scripture are not expressly mentioned; but from these sources were most probably derived the sects, which, in the second century, were known by the names of their several leaders, Cerinthus, Saturninus, Cerdo, Marcion, Basilides, Valentinus, and others; who all building upon the common foundation of the Eastern philosophy, or Gnosis, superadded their own peculiarities, and were differently, tho' equally, remote from the truth. The one thing in which they all agreed was, in perverting and opposing the scripture doctrine concerning the person of Christ. On this point their opinions were as discordant as absurd: some denied that Christ was come in the flesh; they pretended that Christ was sent from heaven by the supreme God, and united himself to Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, at his baptism, and that, when the Jews apprehended the man Jesus,

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^b Rev. 2. 6.

and nailed him to the cross, Christ returned to heaven, and left him to suffer by himself: others ascribed a heavenly derivation to his body, affirming that it passed thro' the Virgin Mary without any participation of her substance; while others asserted that he had no substantial flesh, but that his body was a meer phantom, or apparition, which was neither really born, nor did or could truly suffer. Again, there were others who held the reality of his human nature, yet maintained that Christ did not suffer at all, but that Simon of Cyrene (the bearer of his cross) being taken by the Jews for him, was crucified in his stead, while he stood by and laughed at their mistake. A brief recital of these extravagancies is sufficient for my present purpose: for a more particular account, I refer the reader to Sir Peter King's History of the Creed, already mentioned. Many passages in the apostles writings are directed against these dangerous errors, for they strike at the root of the faith and hope of the gospel, and are subversive of the whole tenor both of the Old and New Testament. It was believed by the ancients, that St. John wrote his gospel with some view to these heresies, and it is certain that in his first epistle, where (putting the disciples upon their guard against the many false prophets who were gone out into the world) he observes that the common point, in which all
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their divers opinions agreed, was a denial that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh^c: he reminds them that, as they had heard Antichrist must come, even so now there were many Antichrists, and that the name was applicable to all who denied that Jesus is the Christ: he admits that these false teachers went out from amongst themselves, that is, they had borne the Christian name, but he refers to the doctrines they taught, as a sufficient proof that they had never been of the number of true Christians; for if they had been of us, no doubt, they would have continued with us^d. If opinions, equally wild and extravagant, were at this time maintained and propagated by persons, who, for a season, had been warm for truth and reformation, we are not afraid that they would prejudice our cause with any who will allow due weight to the reasoning of St. John; for if they had been really of us once, they would have still continued with us.

But the truth is, The teachers in our time, whose leading tenets most nearly symbolize with these antient heresies, are not charged, or even suspected, of having had any attachment to the doctrines which I am concerned to vindicate; nor is an apology expected from them, for they give but little offence. Since the fabulous disguise, under which the Gnostics of old veiled their opinions, has been
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^c 1 John 2. 22. and 4. 3.

^d 1 John 2. 19.

laid aside, their opposition to the deity and atonement of Christ has been adopted by so many who are applauded for ingenuity, fine reasoning and great learning, that it bids fair to be the fashionable divinity of the age; and tho' the sufferings of Jesus are not denied, yet their proper causes and ends are openly exploded, and the attempt has often proved an easy path to acceptance, wealth and dignity.

The attachment of the Jewish converts to the law of Moses was another source of error, which occasioned daily disputes in the churches, and gave rise, in the issue, to dangerous heresies, subversive of the true faith; even those of them, who had sincerely received the gospel, could not easily be persuaded that a law, given to Moses by God himself, with so much solemnity, from mount Sinai, was to be entirely abrogated, and that their obligation to it was, *ipso facto*, vacated the moment they believed in Jesus, who, by his obedience unto death, had accomplished all its types and ceremonies, and wrought out for his people an everlasting righteousness commensurate to its utmost requirements. The apostles, who, after the pattern of their Lord, were gentle and tender to the weak of the flock, bore with their infirmities*, and allowed them to retain a distinction of meats and days, and other observances,

* Rom. 14. 2—6.

servances, provided they did not consider these things in such a point of view, as to interfere with God's appointed method of justification by faith in his Son ; but the matter was carried much farther, for no sooner was there a church formed at Antioch, than they were troubled with perverse teachers^f, who told them that, except they were circumcised and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved. The Galatians were greatly hurt by teachers of this sort^g, and as the Jews were dispersed thro' all the provinces, the peace of the church was more or less affected by their attempts to enforce the observance of the law, in almost every place, till after the epistle to the Hebrews was received, and obedience to the Levitical law rendered impracticable by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple^h. From that period, it is probable, the distinction of Jew and Gentile believers ceased, and both parties were firmly incorporated into one body ; but a great number of the zealots for the law separated themselves, and were known in the following age by the name of Ebionites, adopting for their rule a mixture of law and gospel, so very different from the gospel Saint Paul preached, that they openly expressed an abhorrence both of his person and writings.

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We

^f Acts 15. 1. ^g Gal. 5. 4.^h Col. 2. 16. Tit. 1. 10. Phil. 3. 2. 1 Tim. 1. 7.

We have an account likewise of some pretended teachers, who opposed the important doctrine of the Resurrection. Some expressly maintained that there was no Resurrectionⁱ; whom St. Paul confutes at large in his first epistle to the Corinthians. Others affirmed the Resurrection is past already^k. Perhaps they pretended that a moral change was designed by the metaphorical expression of a resurrection; the philosophers had used the word in this sense, and this would be sufficient to gain it admittance with some, who would willingly reconcile their profession to the wisdom of the world: in either way, the very foundations of hope were removed: if this point is denied, the whole system of Christian doctrine falls to the ground, and that dreadful train of consequences must be admitted, which the apostle enumerates^l, “If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith also vain, ye are yet in your sins; then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” Since the fertile *resurrection* of ancient mistakes, which is the sin and scandal of the present age, we have been gravely told, that the word signifies no more than the soul’s awaking from the long sleep into which they suppose the period we call Death will plunge it, and that the body has
no

ⁱ 1 Cor. 15. 12.^k 2 Tim. 2. 18.^l 1 Cor. 15. 14—18.

no share in the revival, but dies without hope: but we may thank God for the scripture, which brings comfort, where philosophy gives up the cause as desperate. Faith in Christ is so closely connected with the doctrine of a Resurrection, that it is common with those who oppose the former, to use all their address to explain the latter quite away, and whether they say, It is past already, or, It will never come, their motives, their design, and their manner of reasoning, are the same.

That there were persons who abused the doctrines of grace, as an encouragement to continue in the practice of sin, may be inferred from the epistle of St. James, and several passages of the other apostles. Such, in our modern phrase, are stiled Antinomians, a name, it must be confessed, of very indeterminate application; it is an epithet which many would fix, indiscriminately, upon all who preach a free salvation by faith in the blood of Jesus. If it is all of grace, and we can do nothing of ourselves, if it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy, then we may live as we please, endeavours are useless, and obedience unnecessary^m. These are the inferences which the unenlightened heart charges as unavoidable consequences from the gospel doctrine; and from hence

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we

^m Rom. 11. 6. 2 Cor. 3. 5. Rom. 9. 16.

we obtain a corroborating proof, that we do not mistake St. Paul's sense, or preach a gospel different from his, because he foresaw that the same objections would seem to lie against^a himself, and he guards and protests against such a perversion^o. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! It seems to have been upon this account that he was slandered, and by some affirmed to have taught, Let us do evil, that good may come^p — that is, in modern language (and such things are not spoken in corners amongst us) If any man would be a proper subject of what *they* call Grace, let him become still more vile, and plunge into the most atrocious wickedness, for the greater the sinner the better qualified for mercy. We are content to be reproached (as St. Paul was in his time) for the truth's-sake, and we would be chiefly concerned for the unhappy scorners, who, unless God is pleased to give them repentance unto life, will one day wish they had been idiots, or lunatics, rather than have vented their malicious wit against the grace and gospel of the Lord Christ. But it must be allowed we have seen Antinomians in the worst sense of the word, men who have pleaded for sin, and, while they have laid claim to faith, have renounced and blasphemed that holiness without

^a Rom. 3. 7. and 9. 19.^o Rom. 6. 1.^p Rom. 3. 8.

without which no man shall see the Lord. We cannot wonder that even candid and well-meaning persons have been greatly prejudiced, and discouraged in their enquiries after truth, by the presumption and wickedness of such pretended Christians. But no period of the church, in which the gospel doctrine was known and preached, has been free from offences of this sort. It was so in the apostles days. There were then many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, who subverted whole houses, teaching things which they ought not^a; who professed that they knew God, but in works denied him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate^r; who pretended to faith, but were destitute of those fruits which true faith always produces^s. These are described^t as clouds without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. Sporting themselves with their own deceivings, and beguiling unstable souls^u. In opposition to such deceivers it is written, If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the

^a Tit. I. 10. 11. ^r Tit. I. 16. ^s James 2. 14.

^t Jude 12, 13. ^u 2 Pet. 2. 13, 14.

the truth^w: He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him^x, *For every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure^y*. The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal^z; The Lord knoweth them that are his, and, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

St. Paul, writing to the Theſſalonians concerning the man of Sin^a, who was to be fully revealed in the following ages, reminds them, that the mystery of iniquity, tho' at that time restrained from a full manifestation, did already work. Teaching us, that the seeds of that grand apostacy, which at length overspread the whole professing church, were sown, and springing up, at the time of his writing. And he mentions several particulars in his epistle to the Colossians^b, such as, a voluntary or self-devised humility, in worshipping angels as mediators or intercessors, a dogmatic inhibition of things which God had left free, and a specious scheme of will-worship and mortification, which, under pretence of self-denial, did really gratify pride, vanity, and self-righteousness. The progress of our history will shew

^w 1 John 1. 6. ^x 1 John 2. 4. ^y 1 John 3. 6.

^z 2 Tim. 2. 19. ^a 2 Theſſ. 2. 3—10.

^b Col. 2. 18—23.

shew what a harvest of dreadful and wide-spreading evils were produced from these principles, until at length the gospel of Christ was wholly obscured, and the lives and consciences of men were given up to the power of Antichrist, who, as god, insolently sat down in the temple of God, and exalted himself above all laws, human and divine. It is sufficient to my purpose, at present, to take notice, that the beginnings of that spiritual infatuation, which so long detained the world in chains, and darkness, and slavery, under the tyranny of the church of Rome, were observable in St. Paul's time, and therefore deserve a place in the list of those pestilent heresies by which the enemy of souls attempted to defile the faith, and disturb the peace, of the primitive church.

Many other things are alluded to, which, for want of authentic records of the first century, we cannot with certainty explain. Besides the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, already mentioned, we read of the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews but are not, but of the synagogue of Satan^c, Of them who held the doctrine of Balaam, and of the woman Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess^d. These were certainly heretics, for our Lord severely rebukes the churches for

^c Rev. 3. 9.

^d Rev. 2. 14. 20.

for not opposing them to the utmost; and, as he gives them different names, they probably differed from each other, tho' their ultimate tendency was the same, to pervert the faith of the hearers, and to introduce licentiousness of practice. The gospel truth is a doctrine according to godliness, and has a sanctifying influence; for the grace of God teaches* all who are partakers of it, to forsake all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world. But errors and heresies, in whatever degree they prevail, have a poisonous effect upon those who admit them: some are calculated to set aside the whole frame of obedience which we owe to our God and Saviour, and the most refined and plausible will deliver the soul into the power of some easy, besetting, and beloved sin, and furnish arms and arguments to maintain it. And this explains what would otherwise seem a very strange phenomenon. When the truth is proposed with the greatest clearness and the greatest advantages, its votaries, at all times, and in all places, have been but few; but whoever will stand up on the side of error, however wild and absurd his opinions and conduct may be, will hardly fail of obtaining adherents. It is because error will tolerate those lusts and follies which

* Titus 2. 11, 12.

which truth will not endure: and in the present state of human depravity, more people will be found willing to give up their understandings, than to part with their sins.

We may likewise collect from several texts in the epistles, that there were those of old who denied what the scripture teaches concerning the depravity of human nature, the real guilt of sin^t, the influences of the Holy Spirit^s, and the terrors of a future judgment^h, tho' we cannot be sure that these doctrines were opposed so openly and so strenuously as they are in our own days. But I have renumerated enough to answer my purpose, by way of apology for the evangelical doctrine, the modern opposers of the last-mentioned points not being under any suspicion or charge of what is called enthusiasm; and all who are despised or persecuted for resting the hope of their salvation solely upon the mediation of Jesus, and his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, are known to acknowledge them as essential truths; indeed they stand inseparably connected with what they believe of his person, offices, power and grace. A conscience impressed with the majesty, holiness and justice of the great God, and that trembles at the denunciations of his law against every transgression,

^t 1 John 1. 8, 10.

^s Jude 19.

^h 2 Pet. 3. 9.

gression, dares not hope for peace without the discovery of an adequate atonement for sin, nor venture its eternal concerns upon the interposition of a creature. To such a one, all that is revealed of the love and sufferings of Jesus, would afford no solid ground of consolation, if the infinite dignity of his divine nature, and his voluntary substitution in the place and on the behalf of sinners, were not revealed with equal clearness; and a conviction of that total insufficiency for every good workⁱ, and the prevalence of indwelling sin^k, which the scripture so expressly declares to be the condition of every child of Adam, would plunge an awakened mind into hopeless despair, if it was not relieved by the gracious promise of the infallible Spirit^l, whose office is to teach, guide, comfort and seal the children of God unto the day of compleat redemption^m; but having such a great high-priestⁿ, who, by his own blood, has entered into the holy place, to appear in the presence of God for us, and having, in the promise of the Holy Spirit^o, a source of succour and comfort answerable to all our ignorance, weakness, necessities and temptations, we are enabled, in the midst of fightings and fears^p, to maintain

ⁱ 2 Cor. 3. 5.

and 16. 7, 13.

9. 24. and 10. 19.

7. 5.

^k Rom. 7. 18—24.^m Ephes. 4. 30.^o Rom. 8. 16, 26, 27.^l John 14. 26.ⁿ Heb. 8. 1. and^p 2 Cor.

tain a humble confidence that we shall not be ashamed before him at his coming, but have boldness in the day of judgment, the great and terrible day of the Lord^a. On the other hand, it is no wonder that those who do not acknowledge the deity of the Saviour (not finding any other basis whereon to rest the validity of an atonement for sin) should embrace every shadow of an argument against its necessity, and be willing to think as highly as possible of their own righteousness and abilities; or, that being thus persuaded that they can please God, without the influence of his spirit, *themselves*, they should treat all claims to this assistance in *others*, as enthusiasm and folly. Nor can we be surprized that many who reject the scripture testimony concerning Christ and the Holy Spirit, should use all their address to prove that the soul sinks into sleep and inactivity at death, that the resurrection of the flesh is improbable, and that it is injurious to the goodness of God, to suppose he will inflict eternal punishment for sins committed within the compass of a short life. Such reasonings may be expected from men who presume upon the sufficiency of their own wisdom, who neither expect nor desire divine teaching, and who find a little relief in these sentiments, against the fears and forebodings which will sometimes force themselves upon their minds.

It

^a 1 John 2. 28. and 4. 17.

It appears however, from the indisputable evidence of the New Testament, that, in the first age of the church, the enemy sowed the tares of error and heresy in great abundance, and that the ~~figments~~ ^{systems} published in that period, by men who professed some regard to the name of Christ, have not been surpassed, either as to absurdity or wickedness, by any attempts of the same kind, in any age or country since. It is true, the vigilance and authority of the apostles restrained these excesses from rising to that height to which they afterwards attained; but if the people who now object to the variety of names, sects and sentiments, which have gradually prevailed amongst us within these thirty years past, had lived in the primitive church, they would have had at least equal cause for making the like objections. If, upon these accounts, they now think themselves at liberty to reject all parties alike, without examination, as empty pretenders to the truth, purity, and power of religion, there is little doubt but they would have done the same *then*. The apostles were personally present with the first churches, their writings were appointed to be the rule of succeeding times, and, thro' the mercy of God, are in our hands. Whoever is sincerely desirous to know the will of God, by attending to these lively oracles, will be enabled to discern the path of truth and peace, thro' the midst of that maze of opinions, wherein

wherein so many are bewildered and lost; but whoever is too wise, or too indolent, to search the scripture humbly and diligently for himself, would have paid as little regard to the authority of the apostles, if he could have conversed with them; nay, the advantage is on our side, for, as the scriptures are held in professed veneration, we run no immediate risk of character or interest by consulting them, or they may be perused in retirement, unobserved by our nearest friends: whereas the apostles, tho' highly spoken of amongst us, were accounted, while they lived, the filth and off-scouring of all things, they were despised for their poverty and the meanness of their appearance, and detested as bigots and enthusiasts, so that it required some degree of faith and grace not to be ashamed of them.

Let not the reader be offended, if I close this book, as I did the former, with entreating him to reflect on the importance of having right views of the gospel of Christ, and of the spirit of Christianity. These are topics of universal concern. A believer in Jesus, however obscure, unnoticed or oppressed in the present life, is happy; he is a child of God, the charge of angels, an heir of glory^{*}; he has meat to eat that the world knows not of, and from the knowledge of his union and relation to his Redeemer^{*}, he derives a peace which passes understanding, and a power suited to

A a

every

^{*} Rom. 8. 14, 17. ^{*} Phil. 4. 7.

every service and circumstance of life ; tho weak in himself he is strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus the Lord ^u, upon whom he relies, as his wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and expects from him, in due time, a compleat redemption from every evil ^w; his faith is not merely speculative, like the cold assent we give to a mathematical truth, nor is it the blind impulse of a warm imagination, but it is the effect of an apprehension of the wisdom, power and love displayed in the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ ; it is a constraining principle ^x, that works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world ; it gives the foretaste and evidence of things invisible to mortal eyes, and transforming the soul into the resemblance of what it beholds, fills the heart with benevolence, gentleness and patience, and directs every action to the sublimest ends, the glory of God, and the good of mankind.

But whatever is stiled religion, that is not thus pure, thus peaceable, thus operative, or at least that does not lead the soul to desire the graces of the spirit, and to seek them in God's appointed way, by faith in his Son, is unworthy the name. If you have not the spirit of Christ, you are none of his ^y; whatever else you may have, you have no interest in the promised blessings of the gospel; whatever else

^t 2 Cor. 12. 9.

^u 2 Tim. 2. 1.

^w 1 Cor. 1. 30.

^x Gal. 5. 6. Acts 15. 9. 1 John 5. 4. Heb. 11. 1.

2 Cor. 3. 18.

^y Rom. 8. 9.

else you can do, you cannot please God^a. If you do not count all things loss, and of no value^b, in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, you certainly do not understand the word Gospel in St. Paul's sense; if you did, you would be of his mind: and are you not in danger of incurring that anathema, which, under the influence of the Spirit of God, he denounces^c against all who love not the Lord Jesus? Search the scriptures, if you really think that in them you have eternal life^d. If indeed you could prove them to be cunningly devised fables, you might neglect them without danger^e; but, if the scriptures are true, there is a day coming when God shall judge the world^f. I need not appeal to scripture to convince you, that, whatever your situation in life is, you must leave it, and experience a moment, when the pleasures or honours of this world will afford you no comfort; but, if the scriptures are true, you must then appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; you must stand either at the right-hand or the left^g. Important alternative! For to those on the left-hand the King will say, Depart from me, ye accursed^h!—If hitherto, while you have professed his name, you have had your heart filled with enmity against his doctrine and his people,

^a Heb. 11. 6.^b Phil. 3. 8.^c 1 Cor. 16. 22.^d John 5. 39.^e 2 Pet. 1. 16.^f Acts. 17. 31.^g 2 Cor. 5. 10.^h Mat. 25. 41.

people, if you have accounted his wisdom foolishness, and reproached the operations of his spirit as enthusiasm and madness—it is to be hoped you have done it thro' ignorance, you knew not what you did^h; there is then forgiveness with him; as yet he is upon a throne of grace. May the Spirit of God lead you to him before he takes his seat upon the throne of judgment! otherwise you are lost for ever. My heart's desire and prayer to God, for my readers, will be, that not one of them may fall under that awful sentence, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish! for I work a work in your days, which you shall in no wise believe, tho' a man declare it unto youⁱ.

^h 1 Tim. i. 15. Luke 23. 34.

ⁱ Acts 13. 41.



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